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SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY
SIMMONS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

SCHOLARS PROGRAMS: AN INSTITUTIONAL ENIGMA

By

Lindsay Davis

An Applied Dissertation submitted to
Department of Education Policy and Leadership
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Spring 2021

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This dissertation submitted by Lindsay Davis has been read and approved by the following faculty members of the Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University. The final copy has been examined by the Dissertation Committee and the signatures which appear here verify the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given the final approval with reference to content, form and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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When I began my doctoral journey three years ago, I knew I was fortunate to have endless support from my friends and family, namely my husband, Joe, my mom, and my dad. Since that time, I have added my daughter, Elliott, to that list of supporters, and I have lost my dad after a long journey with a debilitating illness. This dissertation is dedicated to my dad, Donny Ray, who was my greatest educational cheerleader. I distinctly remember graduating from the Master's of Education in Higher Education Program at Southern Methodist University in 2014. After graduation, I proudly exclaimed that I was done with school forever. My dad laughed and assured me that I would be back. He was right.

My dad always encouraged me to seek challenges, to pursue my passions, and to be patient with things that take a lot of time and effort. This dissertation embodies all of those lessons, patience most especially. My dad also told me time and time again how important it was to have academic experiences outside of the classroom. Those, he believed and I agree, are among the best opportunities for students to grow. For me, writing about scholars programs was not only in alignment with my professional experiences, but also served a nod, however slight, to my dad's philosophy on learning outside of the classroom. I know he would be proud of the work I have done.

Over the last three years, I have taken to identifying various members of my family as my research assistants. My daughter, Elliott, is obviously the head research assistant, with her best asset being her charisma and charm during Zoom meetings. My husband, Joe, my mom, Courtney, and my sister, Mary Ashley, have taken on the very important role of supervising the research assistant. My family's dogs, Baxter, Sophie, and Poppy, round out my team of research assistants, though they would prefer napping on my feet (or my laptop) to actually helping. My

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Of course, I legitimately would not have completed this process without the incredible support and mentorship I received from my committee, especially my chair, Dr. Sondra Barringer. Sondra, thank you for allowing me to lean into my type A tendencies and for keeping me from getting too overwhelmed in this process. You know you have a fantastic chair when you leave every single meeting with them feeling better about the next steps you need to accomplish. I could not have asked for a better chair and a more supportive mentor. To Dr. Stephanie Dupaul, thank you for saying yes to serving on my committee during the craziest year to ever hit the field of enrollment management. You are a huge reason why I originally found myself at SMU, and your expertise and network brought a critical perspective to my study. To Dr. Michael Harris, thank you for asking the questions that need to be asked, even if they were not the questions I wanted to answer. This is now the second paper of mine where you have advised that I put things in a completely different order than where I placed them originally, and I know my writing is much stronger for that feedback. At least this time you did not make me cut up the paper with scissors. Fortunately, that experience was exclusive to 2013.

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Abstract

The race to recruit high-achieving students to attend colleges and universities continues to intensify. Institutions view these high-achieving students as a benefit given the prestige associated with their enrollment, which impacts everything from rankings to reputation to resources. Some institutions use scholars programs as one means by which to attract high-achieving students to their campuses, but little is known about scholars programs, why they are created, how they operate, or the role they may play in helping to meet broader institutional goals.

This exploratory study examines scholars programs through the lens of organizational decision-making literature in the context of the undergraduate admission process. A comparative case study of two scholars programs at two institutions informs the creation of a conceptual framework that can be used to study scholars programs (and other targeted student recruitment programs) in greater detail. Recommendations for future research and for practitioners show that while academic literature on scholars programs is scant, there is great opportunity for a deeper understanding of this higher education phenomenon.

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Introduction

Each year on May 1st, thousands of college seniors finalize their decisions on where to attend college. Commonly referred to as College Decision Day, May 1 is a date filled with pride, gravity, and anxiety for many students. However, every year on May 2nd, there are hundreds of colleges and universities with open spaces in their first-year classes. In 2018, 422 institutions had available spaces after College Decision Day (Jaschik, 2018). In 2019, close to 450 colleges and universities found themselves on the “space available” list published by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) (The Princeton Review, 2019). While one might expect to see more open access institutions on this list, more selective institutions are finding themselves missing the mark on filling their first-year class. In 2019, the list included Baylor University, Santa Clara University, and Texas A&M University (The Princeton Review, 2019), all classified as highly competitive institution by *Barron’s Profiles of American Colleges* (Barron’s, 2019). This type of admission shortfall is becoming more common across the country and a shortage of students can negatively affect an institution’s reputation with prospective students (Cook & Frank, 1993).

Rankings, too, can affect an institution’s reputation among prospective students. Each fall, colleges and universities wait with bated breath for the release of the *U.S. News and World Report* Best Colleges rankings. There is celebration when an institution climbs higher in these coveted rankings and despair when an institution drops a spot, or two, or ten. College bound students, for better or for worse, rely on these rankings when helping determine to which institutions they will apply (Morse et al., 2020). Yet the *U.S. News* rankings are a bit of a moving target, as the organization changes its methods for calculating the “best” universities in the nation almost annually (Morse et al., 2020). Institutions are concerned about the impact external

rankings have on their enrollment, especially since these rankings change every year and the institutions have no control over the ranking system. Furthermore, these rankings can impart prestige on universities, and as this study will show, prestige matters.

Externally, an institution's reputation and prestige help to attract top students (Cook & Frank, 1993) and serve as a perceived guarantee of quality to prospective consumers (McDonough et al., 1998). Internally, missing an enrollment target can have devastating consequences for institutions as they become increasingly dependent on tuition revenue (Desrochers & Hurlburt, 2016). Having open spaces in a first-year class can create a sizeable revenue gap in addition to impacting institutional prestige. While prestige certainly matters, lost revenue has a much more detrimental long-term impact on institutional health. Admission shortfalls can have serious negative consequences for colleges and universities, especially as the higher education market becomes increasingly competitive (Litten et al., 1983) and tuition-reliant (Desrochers & Hurlburt, 2016).

Institutional status and prestige drive the application behavior of college-bound students (Hoxby, 2009; Kilgore, 2009). Enrolling students with outstanding academic qualifications increases institutional prestige (Cook & Frank, 1993); therefore, colleges and universities seek to recruit, admit, and enroll high-caliber students. As there is a finite population of college-bound students with the highest academic indicators, how do institutions make themselves more attractive to this target demographic? Institutions utilize merit-based scholarships, need-based financial aid, marketing materials, and/or highly personalized recruitment plans to meet these goals (Dale & Krueger, 2002). Alternatively, as this study addresses, institutions may extend an additional offer of admission to a targeted program such as an honors program (Singell & Tang, 2012) or scholars program to certain high-achieving students. Since the number of high-

achieving students pursuing higher education is not increasing (Litten et al., 1983), institutions compete for this same pool year after year.

Problem of Practice

My problem of practice ties directly to this competition for students between institutions of higher education. Student recruitment is increasingly critical for colleges and universities, especially the recruitment of high-achieving students due to the prestige they bring to institutions. However, recruiting these high-achieving students has become increasingly challenging since there is a finite population of students deemed to be “high-achieving” (Dale & Krueger, 2002). Scholars programs are potentially one way that institutions can bolster their efforts to recruit high-achieving students. However, it is hard to be sure of the linkage between scholars programs and the recruitment of high-achieving students since the literature does not currently address what scholars programs are, why they are created, or what effects they have. Therefore, this exploratory, evaluative study focuses on scholars programs as one specific tool that is intended to yield a high-achieving student to a particular institution.

In this study, I define a scholars program as a program (a) to which students must apply, (b) that operates across academic boundaries of an institution, (c) that is operated by the university, not by students, and (d) that focuses around a specific student quality or interest. Currently, 50 such programs are members of the Undergraduate Scholars Program Administrators Association (USPAA), and membership in this organization has grown in recent years (USPAA, 2021), which suggests new scholars programs are still being created. Despite their existence in several colleges and universities, the reason scholars programs exist is currently undocumented in academic literature. Given the characteristics they share with honors programs and personalized recruitment strategies that are designed to attract high-caliber

students, I argue that scholars programs also seek to bring high achieving students to institutions. Researchers have not studied why institutions pursue the use of scholars programs rather than other tools (i.e. honors programs, scholarship funding) to recruit high achieving students. Why do colleges and universities make these decisions about creating and operating scholars programs? A framework of organizational decision-making literature and the study that follows will help to answer three research questions:

1. Why are scholars programs created?
2. How do scholars programs operate?
3. What role do scholars programs play in helping to meet broader institutional goals?

Answering each of these questions will allow me to better understand the purpose of scholars programs, what scholars programs do, and the interplay between institutions and their scholars programs, therefore addressing my larger problem of practice related to the challenge of recruiting high-achieving students.

Recruiting High-Achieving Students through Targeted Programs

In order to drive high-achieving students to apply to and enroll in colleges and universities, and perhaps meet some of their broader institutional goals, institutions may offer these students admission to a special program within the institution as a whole. Since enrolling high-achieving students increases institutional prestige (Cook & Frank, 1993), many institutions compete for this group of students. I argue that honors colleges/programs and scholars programs are two targeted programs used to court high-achieving students. According to the literature, honors programs and honors colleges attract students of a high academic caliber (Singell & Tang, 2012), and scholars programs attract students who are high achievers in areas specific to

the focus of each program. Scholars programs could look for students who have achieved at a high level in service, leadership, community focus, or a variety of other factors. First, this section discusses scholars programs, which are not documented in the literature at all, but are the ultimate interest of my study. With this in mind, the section on scholars programs relies on primary sources from institutions with scholars programs. This is followed by a discussion of honors programs, which are well-documented in the literature, as the available body of literature most closely related to scholars programs. Each of these targeted programs are a means of recruiting students that will help increase institutional status and prestige, which both institutions and students find valuable. Institutions desire prestige to enroll high-achieving students since they know high-achieving students desire to attend prestigious institutions (Cook & Frank, 1993; Hoxby, 2009; Kilgore, 2009). Understanding them both here, at the onset of my study, will allow for greater understanding of the academic literature found in Chapter 3.

Scholars Programs

The bulk of this study focuses around an institutional feature called scholars programs. Since no definition of scholars programs exists in the literature, I define a scholars program as a program (a) to which students must apply, (b) that operates across academic boundaries of an institution, (c) that is operated by the university, not by students, and (d) that focuses around a specific student quality or interest. These programs have existed at least since the creation of The Morehead-Cain Scholars Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1945, which proudly titles itself the first scholars program in the country (Morehead-Cain Foundation, 2019). However, this is not only a phenomenon of the past. The 1990s saw a wave of scholars program creation with the Nancy Ann and Ray L. Hunt Leadership Scholars Program at Southern Methodist University (Southern Methodist University, 2021) and the Danforth Scholars

Program at Washington University in Saint Louis (Washington University in Saint Louis, 2021). Furthermore, scholars programs at some institutions are quite new. For example, the Forty Acres Scholars Program at the University of Texas at Austin began in 2014 (The University of Texas at Austin, 2021). Similarly, the Wilson Scholars Program at Appalachian State University was founded just one year prior, in 2013 (Appalachian State University, 2021). This trajectory shows that creation of scholars programs is not only a recent phenomenon but that such programs exist across a wide range of institutions.

While no scholarly research on scholars programs currently exists, institutional documents and some relevant theories can help to elucidate what scholars programs are, what purpose they may serve, and how they compare among each other.

Further Defining Scholars Programs. By looking at various scholars program websites, it is clear each college or university with a scholars program funnels considerable monetary resources into their operation (e.g. student scholarships, support, and programming). However, little is known about these programs. What purpose do scholars programs serve in the larger university landscape? Why do institutions continue to create scholars programs? What is a scholars program? This last question may be most easily answered by what a scholars program is not. First and foremost, a scholars program is not an honors program or honors college in the traditional sense. Scholars programs provide students with extra- or co-curricular opportunities of some type ranging from service projects, to leadership development seminars, to networking opportunities.

A cursory examination of scholars program websites supports my definition that these programs each cohere around a general theme, which may vary among institutions. The Hesburg-Yusko Scholars Program at the University of Notre Dame, for example, coheres around

the idea of leadership development (University of Notre Dame, 2021). Alternatively, the Park Scholars Program at North Carolina State University focuses on experiential academic learning for its scholars (North Carolina State University, 2021). While these two foci differ from one another, each program seeks to provide something supplemental to the general student experience at the program's home institution.

In order to more thoroughly understand my working definition of a scholars program, I will apply it to the Morehead-Cain Scholars Program at UNC, the first scholars program (Morehead-Cain Foundation, 2019), as one example. Students must apply to the Morehead-Cain Scholars Program by October 15 of their senior year, in addition to applying and being admitted to the university, and must go through a video interview and an in-person interview process if they are ultimately accepted to the scholars program (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2021). Morehead-Cain Scholars are not required to have a major or minor in a certain area of the institution; rather, they must only possess a true love of learning in their planned course of study (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2021). There is no student organization component to the Morehead-Cain Scholars Program, as program staff are tasked with managing the scholars' experience (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2021). Finally, the Morehead-Cain Scholars Program is looking for students who have excelled in leadership (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2021), making this their cohering theme. Therefore, the Morehead-Cain Scholars Program fits all four prongs of my definition. It is a program (a) to which students must apply, (b) that operates across academic boundaries of an institution, (c) that is operated by the university, not by students, and (d) that focuses around a specific student quality or interest.

It is also important to understand the purpose of a professional organization for institutional faculty and staff who operate scholars programs. The Undergraduate Scholars Program Administrators Association (USPAA), founded in 2006 by a group of scholars program administrators, seeks to support and facilitate communication and a collegial community among member programs (USPAA, 2021). The association is open only to programs affiliated with a specific institution that provides scholarship funds and enriching opportunities to their scholars (USPAA, 2021). The USPAA membership criteria and mission align with the definition of scholars programs that will be utilized throughout this study. I chose to build a more comprehensive definition of scholars programs because USPAA only lists eligibility criteria for members, which states members must be affiliated with a college or university program that provides funding or enriching opportunities to student members (USPAA, 2021). I felt these criteria needed a bit more clarity before becoming an actual definition of scholars programs. However, given the lack of scholarly research on this topic, finding some degree of alignment with the purposes institutionalized through a professional association will provide clarity and practical applicability to this study.

Purpose of Scholars Programs. In theory, institutions design scholars program experiences for some purpose, though that purpose is not currently defined by the literature known. One possibility is that these continually emerging programs assist institutions in meeting some broader set of goals. Scholars programs can interplay with student success metrics, development goals, and national status rankings that hold great importance to higher education institutions, all of which will be explored further in my study. While many campus resources contribute to the operation of scholars programs, little is known about how, and to what degree, such programs contribute to the goals of those institutions. There are currently 50 member

programs in USPAA, and this membership list does not capture all scholars programs across the United States. A list of USPAA members can be found in Appendix A. The prevalence of scholars programs combined with the lack of knowledge on their outcomes creates a pressing need for this study.

This lack of knowledge leads me to argue that there are three expected drivers of the creation of these mysterious scholars programs: donors, institutional striving, and the pursuit and maintenance of prestige. While each of these is discussed in the next section of this literature review, I believe that different levels of status and prestige could lead to different drivers to create scholars programs within institutions. Additionally, middle status conformity may explain why institutions in this middle tier of status create scholars programs. Middle status institutions are more likely to conform to a concept, like creating a scholars program, because they aim to increase their standing but are insecure about the potential of being excluded (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001).

As discussed in the section on honors programs and honors colleges, honors programs were seen more frequently at institutions ranked by *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges* as highly competitive and very competitive (as opposed to the most competitive), and institutions classified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as selective (England, 2010; Long, 2002). These mid-range institutions proved to be the ideal environment in which honors programs could perform at their best, as student success outcomes were shown in a study by Bowman and Culver (2017) to be impacted more intensely by honors programs at less selective institutions. In this study, students who participated in honors programs at less selective institutions earned higher GPAs, were retained at higher levels, and graduated within four years at higher rates than their non-honors peers. At more selective institutions, honors students only

earned higher GPAs than their non-honors peers. The less selective institutions saw greater benefits of honors program participation to their students (Bowman & Culver, 2017). As I detail when discussing organizational decision-making literature, this idea of status- and prestige-seeking behavior by middle status institutions serves as one expected reason for why scholars programs exist. The study on middle status conformity theory and honors programs led me to this argument.

Similarities and Differences among Scholars Programs. It is important to understand that not all scholars programs may be seeking the same type of high-achieving students. Program foci may vary as institutional goals vary, and my study will delve further into this interplay between the two. As an example of how foci and purposes may differ, the Forty Acres Scholars Program, situated in a large, highly competitive public institution, may seek to create the atmosphere of a smaller, more liberal arts college type experience for scholars that can be coupled with the benefits of attending a large university (Barron's, 2021; The University of Texas at Austin, 2021). The Hesburg-Yusko Scholars Program, alternatively, is housed in a mid-sized institution classified by *Barron's* as the most competitive (Barron's, 2021; University of Notre Dame, 2021). Hesburg-Yusko Scholars are offered opportunities that could potentially cause them to choose to attend the University of Notre Dame over other similarly competitive institutions. Finally, the Wilson Scholars Program at Appalachian State, which is not classified as a selective institution, creates a selective opportunity for scholars where one might not otherwise be present (Barron's, 2021; Appalachian State University, 2021). Perhaps this type of program in this type of university makes Appalachian State a more appealing institution to higher-achieving students during the admission process.

Concluding Remarks on Scholars Programs. Despite the lack of explicit research on scholars programs, institutional program information and other applicable literatures start to inform a broad understanding of the programs. This study helps to fill a gap in the higher education literature that serves to truly understand the purpose of scholars programs. While each program has its own slightly different focus and purpose, the programs do provide some common elements to students, as noted in my definition, even if those elements appear in slightly different packaging. Through the study at hand, the purposes, experiences, and foci of these targeted student recruitment programs will become clearer to researchers and practitioners alike.

Honors Programs

Similar to scholars programs, honors programs and honors colleges represent one method institutions use to recruit academic high-achievers to enroll in colleges and universities. Especially in larger public institutions, honors programs may be used to give invited students the experience of a smaller, private, liberal arts college within a more comprehensive university (Stich, 2018). Much of the literature on honors programs focuses on students' experiences and outcomes in the programs themselves, but this tie to student recruitment and admission through constructing an appealing, special experience for high-achievers (Cook & Frank, 1993) creates an interesting connectivity between the two bodies of literature and shares many similarities with the elements of scholars programs discussed in the previous section. Both honors programs and scholars programs represent an offer of admission to an exclusive program on top of a general offer of admission to the institution. Both honors programs and scholars programs offer students special experiences, as I will discuss in the next few sections. Both honors programs and scholars programs seek to recruit high achieving students by engaging in these behaviors. With these

parallels in mind, the following sections discuss honors programs, as a well-defined body of literature, to help support the information on scholars programs discussed previously.

Honors Student Experiences and Outcomes. To understand the appeal of honors programs to high-achieving students, one must first understand what an honors program is and what students do as members of these types of programs. Best practices seen in honors programs range from admission policies to financial incentives to student housing structures. 75% of honors programs nationwide come with some sort of financial incentive (Long, 2002), and this merit-based financial aid increases honors program enrollment, even when comparing program enrollment rates to general enrollment rates at selective institutions (Singell & Tang, 2012). Most honors programs make these offers of admission simultaneously with offers of admission to the universities where they are housed and do not allow students to enroll once they have begun their undergraduate career (Long, 2002). While admission requirements for honors programs vary greatly, high school GPA better predicts student success in honors programs than any other pre-college academic factor (McKay, 2009).

Once students are enrolled in honors programs, smaller class sizes are common (Campbell, 2005), as are supplemental opportunities for honors-related academic advising (National Collegiate Honors Council, 2021). Additionally, honors program participants tend to encounter Chickering and Gamson's (1987) best practices for undergraduate education, which have proven to lead to high degrees of student success more frequently and exhibit greater cognitive growth than their non-honors peers (Siefert et al., 2007).

Honors Program Effectiveness. A few areas of contention about honors program practices emerged in the realm of honors housing, a popular trend among many programs. Wawrynski et al. (2012) found no effect of structured honors housing on student sense of

belonging, peer interaction, or student involvement level. Perhaps this aligns with the concern that honors programs, when managed in an insular way, can tend to isolate students from the rest of the institutional community (Campbell, 2005; Long, 2002).

Aside from program offerings and best practices, honors programs have clear, measurable benefits on student success, retention, and graduation. First and foremost, though, honors programs help institutions recruit high-achieving students to attend their institutions (Long, 2002). At one large public research university, 92% of incoming honors students said acceptance into the honors program was important in their decision to attend that particular university (Campbell, 2005). Students see some sort of benefit to these opportunities when they are making their college decisions. Additionally, in the admission process, honors programs often deal with smaller numbers of applicants and are able to offer a more holistic review of applications, even within larger institutions. In this way, honors programs are able to extend offers based on factors and qualifications beyond sheer academic indicators and be more personal in their yield outreach to admitted students, allowing them to act more like admission officers at smaller institutions (Singell & Tang, 2012). Since some purely academic indicators, like standardized test scores, are prone to bias (Lucido, 2018; Sedlacek, 2004), institutions may see more targeted decisions in honors program admission as a means to meet different sets of institutional goals.

The benefits of an honors education for students continue once they arrive on campus. Many honors program components such as additional advising and smaller class sizes are correlated with higher student retention rates (Campbell, 2005). Relatedly, participation in an honors program is positively correlated to college GPA and graduation rates, even when adjusting for pre-college characteristics, which is especially interesting since these programs may

require more of their students than the traditional college graduation requirements (Bowman & Culver, 2017). Students in honors programs also outpaced their non-honors peers in terms of cognitive development during college, again after controlling for pre-college characteristics (Siefert et al., 2007). Though selection bias may be a contributing factor, these benefits only remain relevant when students complete an honors program. Program retention and completion appear to impact the ability of honors programs to provide the benefits to students they claim to provide. Honors program finishers earned higher GPAs and graduated at higher rates than students who started, but did not finish, honors programs. Those partial honors completers showed no significant increase in GPA or graduation rate over their non-honors peers (Cosgrove, 2004). While honors programs help with institutional retention, this issue of retention within the program itself represents an interesting concern.

Institutional Effects of Honors Programs. Beyond the experiences of honors students, honors programs affect, and are affected by, broader institutional policies, goals, and outcomes. Understanding the institutional effects are important for this study since my larger problem of practice focuses on institutional decision-making. The institutional effects of honors programs can help inform the expected institutional effects of scholars program. With this in mind, whether referencing admission policies, yield rates, or academic rigor, the prevalence of honors programs presents an example of middle status conformity. In a middle status conformity situation, high status actors feel they can deviate from expected behavior a bit more because their status is secure; low status actors feel they can deviate from expected behavior because they will be excluded regardless of what they do; and middle status actors have the most to gain and the most to lose (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001). An inverted u-shaped curve representing the relationship between status and conformity follows (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001). Elsewhere in

higher education, middle status conformity can be seen in the types of institutions that choose to adopt new academic fields (Brint et al., 2001) and the types of institutions that employ enrollment management models (Kraatz et al., 2010). In each of these cases, as in the case of honors programs, high-status institutions do not need to take a risk trying something new, and low-status institutions tend to be less concerned with status anyway (Brint et al., 2001; Kraatz et al., 2010).

In specific reference to honors programs, public institutions, institutions ranked by *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges* as highly competitive and very competitive (as opposed to the most competitive), and institutions classified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as selective were the most likely to have honors programs (England, 2010; Long, 2002). In one study by Bowman and Culver (2017), impacts of honors programs on student success metrics were shown to be greater at less selective institutions than they were at more selective students. Honors programs tend to exist at institutions in fierce competition for students: private institutions with higher tuition costs, institutions in extremely competitive geographic markets, larger institutions, and at institutions that are bound by mission to maintain more open enrollment policies, but still want to attract bright students (Long, 2002). Such a reaction represents a classic case of middle status conformity in action and draws a parallel to the expected drivers of scholars program creation I discuss in conjunction with organizational decision-making literature. Understanding reasons institutions might create honors programs (e.g. to recruit high-achieving students to attend institutions) will help inform my study of why institutions might create scholars programs.

As institutional goals and missions tend to shift over time, the prevalence of honors programs also presents concerns for some members of the higher education community. As

public higher education especially seeks to find a balance between access and institutional differentiation (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003), honors programs may be seen as a means of stratification within a more overall accessible institution (Stich, 2018). Once an honors program has been used to recruit high-achieving students to attend an institution, those high-achieving students are then separated into smaller, honors-specific courses (Campbell, 2005) that segregate students from their non-honors peers (Stich, 2018). In this way, honors programs are sometimes viewed as elitist ventures that siphon institutional resources away from the general student population (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003). Though this stratification of students likely presents an unintended consequence of the spread of honors programs, the alienation of the masses, especially underrepresented students, proves troublesome to critics of honors programs (Stich, 2018). Since scholars programs tend to look beyond traditional academic indicators in admission decisions, the stratified hierarchy supported by honors programs may not be analogous with how scholars programs recruit and cluster students. However, I will keep this concern with honors programs in mind as I study scholars programs.

Concluding Remarks on Honors Programs. Concerns aside, sets of best practices, impacts on student success measures, and the idea of honors programs as an example of middle status conformity appear uniformly across single institution studies and multi-institutional studies on honors programs (Bowman & Culver, 2017; Long, 2002). The second and third overarching themes are of particular interest to scholars programs in relation to institutional goals. Honors programs have clear benefits for recruiting, retaining, and graduating high-achieving students, and they allow institutions to operate beyond their traditional classified statuses. With each of these things in mind, the case for honors programs, and therefore scholars programs, as a driver of institutional goals becomes stronger. Of course, the unintended

consequences of honors programs should not be overlooked in the literature or the study that follows, as the stratification provides a cautionary tale for scholars programs in how they can better align with institutional goals.

As mentioned previously, it is important to remember that literature on honors programs is the closest body of research to academic literature on scholars programs, since none currently exists. Scholars programs represent a gap in the higher education literature, though studies on honors programs will help inform my study of scholars programs. Since each targeted program is used to recruit high-achieving students to attend institutions, there will likely be some parallels between my findings and the extant body of research on honors programs.

Key Takeaways on Honors and Scholars Programs

Whether through the use of honors programs and colleges or scholars programs, institutions use these targeted programs to help attract high-achieving students (Singell & Tang, 2012). Since there is no academic literature on scholars programs, I rely on the body of scholarship about honors programs to provide a bit more insight into scholars programs in advance of my own study. While the two phenomena can both help institutions recruit high-achieving students, honors programs and college focus on more pure academic themes while scholars programs are more varied in their focus. Honors programs and honors colleges have been studied in academic research, and scholars programs have not. In this manner, the study adds a scholarly perspective to the primary documents currently available on scholars programs through institutional website and reports. The core of the study, however, boils down to *why* scholars programs exist. Why do institutions decide they need to create and maintain programs like this? While I argue that attracting high-achieving students has something to do with the

decision, the choices I made in designing my study help me to answer these questions most effectively.

Analytic Approach

To most appropriately understand why these scholars programs were formed, how they operate, and the goals they play in helping institutions meet their broader goals, I used a comparative case study of two scholars programs at selective, private institutions. This particular design is well suited for studying emerging phenomena with high degrees of complexity, like scholars programs (Yin, 2003). Both of the cases selected for my study represent typical scholars programs. The Newman Scholars Program at Academy University and the Presidential Scholars Program at Oscar University¹ are described in greater depth in Chapter 3.

Since case studies are used to generate transferability in a more theoretical and analytical manner, selecting two typical cases such as these two scholars programs gave me an appropriate means for meeting those goals (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, since the two cases I selected are housed within selective institutions, they facilitate exploration of my larger problem of practice related to recruitment of high achieving students, since selective institutions frequently seek out high achieving students. For my study in particular, using typical cases is preferable since I am studying a currently un-studied phenomenon in higher education. Furthermore, the conceptual framework described in Chapter 3 was developed based on what I presumed to be fairly standard dimensions of a scholars program based on my professional expertise. Using two typical cases in conjunction with a framework that relies on typical program dimensions allows me to begin to draw analytical generalizations about scholars programs, as Yin mentions (2003). Additionally, the institutions that house the programs serving as my cases represent institutions that are

¹ Pseudonyms are used for institutions, program names, and interview participant names throughout this study.

pursuing or maintaining prestige and are either undertaking, or have recently undertaken, striving behavior, in alignment with two of the proposed scholars program drivers I outline in Chapter 2.

To ascertain why scholars programs were formed, how they operate, and what role they play in meeting broader institutional goals, I utilized interviews and document analysis at both of my cases. Interviews helped me to capture stories about the scholars programs, understand how program administrators interpret the programs themselves, and speak with the people who know the most about each of these programs (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). I conducted interviews with the scholars program directors and relied on a purposive sampling technique (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016) to select other administrators and staff who work with the scholars programs to interview. I relied on document analysis in conjunction with interviews to round out my case study. Documents are effective when studying historical phenomena, like some of the older scholars programs, and are extremely helpful because they often predate the individuals who are working on the scholars programs now (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). A case study design allowed me to combine the two data collection methods in order to more fully answer my exploratory research questions (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003).

To analyze my interview transcripts and documents, I relied on a combination of a priori codes generated from my own experiential knowledge of scholars programs and emergent codes that appeared in the data as I collected it ((Miles et al., 2019). Coding was iterative, as I allowed for subcodes and higher-level codes to emerge during my data analysis and took care to ensure that each of my codes was applied consistently across interview transcripts and documents (Miles et al., 2019). The a priori codes I generated mapped onto the six scholars program dimensions I identified at the onset of this study: program mission and goals, cohort structure and size, scholarship funds offered to students, program staff size, outcomes associated with the

program, and programmatic experiences for students. Then, to increase the trustworthiness of my data, I utilized member checks, data triangulation, and thick rich description (Creswell & Miller, 2000), all of which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Understanding those six program dimensions that connected to my a priori codes is critical to a full understanding of my analytic approach. I developed these program dimensions based on my own professional experience and the fact that they each speak to the operational elements of scholars programs. Program mission and goals and outcomes associated with the program allude to the institution's purpose for the scholars program. Starting to understand program purpose is important to the research questions and my broader problem of practice since this study seeks to understand why scholars programs exist (the first research question), how they fit into the recruitment of high-achieving students (the problem of practice), and their interactivity institutional goals more broadly (the third research question). Programmatic experiences for students speak to what students actually do as part of a scholars program, which maps onto my second research question concerning how scholars programs operate. Cohort structure and size, scholarship funds offered to students, and resources associated with program identify monetary and staff resources that the institutions contribute to their scholars programs. Looking at resource use is a key element of the larger problem of practice this study addresses since scholars programs require financial resources to recruit students and garner prestige, two other types of resources. Furthermore, understanding resource usage connects to my third research question, which seeks to understand how scholars programs interact with broader university operations and goals. At the most basic level, this study asks how and why scholars programs are created, what they do, and how they relate, or fail to relate, to broader institutional goals.

Significance, Focus, & Contributions

This dissertation focuses on applying decision-making theories and frameworks to answer my research questions and address my problem of practice, which considers the increasing competition institutions face when recruiting high-achieving students. Scholars programs, I posit, are a means by which institutions can engage in the recruitment of high-achieving students. More specifically, this study addressed the following three research questions: (a) Why do scholars programs exist?; (b) How do scholars programs operate?; and (c) What role do they play in meeting broader institutional goals? Each of these three research questions will provide more insight into one mechanism that may influence student recruitment in an increasingly competitive higher education field.

In considering institutional goals, it is plausible that carving out niches for different types of students within an institution would allow those institutions to meet the goals of a more diverse student body. For example, a more open-access institution could maintain its tradition of serving the community but also attract a certain type of high-achieving student with a targeted scholars program. Traditional honors programs have attempted to allow for a more academically rigorous experience in a less academically prestigious institution (Stich, 2018). However, honors programs have also been criticized for creating inter-institutional stratification in more accessible institutions when honors students are segregated into their own courses (Campbell, 2005; Stich, 2018). Scholars programs, this study proposes, often have broader and more accessible foci than traditional honors programs (e.g. service and leadership in scholars programs versus pure academic achievement in honors programs) and may represent a method of recruiting top-notch students that strays from academic elitism. While honors programs look for academic high-achievers, scholars programs look for students who have excelled in leadership, service, or

community-focused work, as is seen with the Morehead-Cain Scholars Program (Morehead-Cain Foundation, 2019) and the Nancy Ann and Ray L. Hunt Leadership Scholars Program (Southern Methodist University, 2021). Something, whether this proposed reason or another, is motivating colleges and universities to create scholars programs, despite the fact that little is known about them at this time. This study explores scholars programs as a potential mechanism for promoting the recruitment of high-achieving students, the broader problem of practice under consideration.

By addressing this conundrum, the study influences both policy and practice. On a practical level, the study can help institutions decide whether or not they might need a scholars program to help meet institutional goals, as it provide a better understanding of the costs and benefits of these programs. For example, would it be relatively easy for an institution to create a scholars program? What kinds of additional factors should be considered when creating such a program? Additionally, what are the critical elements connected to the operations of scholars programs and what kinds of resources are required to successfully enact those operations? More broadly, what would a university do in this situation if there was a broader understanding of scholars programs to assist in decision-making? My study supports the development of a framework for studying scholars programs, which includes my six previously identified program dimensions and three themes that emerged related to scholars programs. Upon further consideration, one of those themes evolved into a seventh dimension, and in its final state (presented in Chapter 5), the framework can be utilized for studying a wide variety of targeted student recruitment programs, including scholars programs.

Additionally, this study on scholars programs framed in organizational decision-making literature represents a gap in the existing higher education literature. The existing literature on decision-making has not been applied in this way. Studies on academic program creation and

deletion were the last to use decision-making literature (e.g. Kraatz & Zajac, 2001), and the bulk of those studies were conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s. Although the literature has not explicitly focused on organizational decision-making since the early 2000s, it has instead emphasized the role of external factors in influencing organizational behavior (e.g. Jaquette, 2012; Kezar & Maxey, 2014). Additionally, a lot has changed in the higher education landscape since these studies. It is quite possible that decision-making dynamics have changed, too. Studying decision-making within this new context of scholars programs can contribute to a body of research that has been recently neglected. Recent works have studied the outcomes of decisions in higher education (e.g. Askin & Bothner, 2016; Lifschitz et al., 2014), but very few studies actually look at the process of decision-making in higher education at this point. My study fills this gap and informs practice.

Summary of Forthcoming Information

Moving forward, in Chapter 2, I outline several bodies of literature that create a broader understanding of the topics at hand before the study is detailed. Literature on admission and decision-making provides a framework for how these areas of research might interact with scholars programs, which are expected to have emerged based on donor demand, institutional striving, and the pursuit of prestige.

In Chapter 3, I outline the research design, data collection, and coding that I undertake in this comparative case study. Through purposive sampling (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016), I analyze two institutions that represent fairly typical cases of scholars programs at selective, private institutions. Since my study is more exploratory in nature, a holistic, multi-case study design allows for a deeper look at a complex phenomenon (Yin, 2003). A combination of document analysis and interviews with program administrators and other faculty, staff, and university

administrators allowed for collection of externally facing data and internally facing information (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

Next, Chapter 4 summarizes my findings related to a series of program dimensions and emergent themes. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of my findings as well as recommendations for research and practice related to each set of findings. Through this study of scholars programs, I sought to learn why they exist, what they do, how they help institutions meet broader goals, and the role they play in recruitment of high-achieving students to different types of institutions.

Literature Review

Given the lack of academic research on scholars programs, three larger bodies of literature inform this study. First, I detail the undergraduate admission process through the admission cycle, trends in admission, and the role of rankings. This particular section sheds a great deal of light on my problem of practice: the increasing competition related to the recruitment of high-achieving students through the admission process. Then, I introduce two targeted programs institutions may use to court high-achieving students to enroll: honors colleges or honors programs and scholars programs. These two bodies of literature lay the groundwork for the fact that institutions may rely on special programs to help recruit high-achieving students to their campuses. Specifically, literature on honors programs or colleges defines these programs, their purpose, and the mixed results of their creation. With no available literature on scholars programs, I rely instead on institutional documents to build a baseline understanding that will inform my study. Lastly, several organizational decision-making theories are outlined and then used to develop three expectations around possible drivers of the creation of scholars programs. These potential drivers provide insight into the mechanism that leads to the creation of a scholars program whether or not those driving forces are tied tightly to an institution's goal of recruiting high-achieving students. Through each of these bodies of research, the institutional enigma of scholars programs becomes a little clearer and ready for detailed study.

Undergraduate Admission

Since I argue that scholars programs are utilized to help institutions attract high-quality students, an overview of admission literature is helpful in understanding possible goals of scholars programs. Before delving into this body of literature, it is important to note that much of the modern admission literature focuses on policy like affirmative action (Anderson et al., 2005)

and trends like test-optional admission (Belasco et al., 2015). While both important topics to study, the older literature around decision processes and student recruitment is more relevant to my study. For that reason, the literature that follows is more dated than would typically be anticipated as it is the most recent research in these topics.

Overall, three decisions comprise the college admission process: a student's decision to apply to an institution, an institution's decision to admit that student, and a student's decision to enroll at an institution (Dale & Krueger, 2002; Litten et al., 1983). Power to make two of the three decisions rests in the hands of the students, which has led to the creation of an entire field of enrollment management to better predict and influence the decisions of prospective students (McDonough, 1994). Admission offices concern themselves with the college admission funnel, which classifies students as prospects, inquiries (who have done something to express interest in an institution), applicants, admitted applicants, and matriculants (who have enrolled at the institution) (Litten et al., 1983). As students move through the various phases of the admission funnel, they begin to solicit more detailed and thorough information on institutions they might choose to attend (Sevier, 2000). This process of information seeking, college inquiries, and looking for the right institutional fit all play into a student's eventual college choice (Litten, 1982).

Enrollment Management

While much of a student's college choice rests in their own hands, this study focuses on institutional behavior, and therefore seeks to learn what institutions do to influence student decisions in the admission process, based on the existing literature. Much of that institutional behavior can be categorized under the umbrella of enrollment management. The field of enrollment management first began in the 1970s and grew out of the idea that factors outside of

the admission office influenced student admission, enrollment, and persistence (Coomes, 2000; Hossler, 2014). At the same time enrollment management was becoming more prevalent, researchers like Alexander Astin (1972) and Vincent Tinto (1975) studied what led students to drop out of college, further intensifying the desire to look at enrollment through a broader lens (Coomes, 2000). Most commonly, enrollment management includes student recruitment, financial aid, academic and career advising, academic support programs, institutional research, orientation, retention programs, and student services, though the exact mix varies by institution (Coomes, 2000; Hossler, 2014). Regardless of the structural framework in each college or university, enrollment management emphasizes the fact that institutions can, and should, take an active and intentional role in shaping each class of new students (Hossler, 2014). The idea of shaping or crafting a class is especially pertinent to this study that considers scholars programs as one such method of crafting a class.

Hossler (2014) reported that enrollment management practices are likely to become more important to colleges and universities over time. Perhaps this is because competition among institutions for students, in particular students with high academic achievement, has grown rapidly over the past few decades (Cook & Frank, 1993; Litten, 1982). Furthermore, this competition often presents as a zero-sum game since the number of high-achieving students pursuing higher education is finite (Litten et al., 1983). Grawe (2018) anticipates a massive decrease in the number of high school graduates expected over the next decade, making recruiting students, much less high-achieving students, that much more challenging. While many models used to predict college enrollments have bettered our understanding of student college choice, most of these models assume student application, admission, and enrollment decisions operate independently. In fact, studying a broader portion of the enrollment management process

provides more accurate and reliable information about a student's college choice (DesJardines et al., 2006). As colleges and universities engage in all of these practices to recruit students, each of the three decisions in the admission process plays an important role in inter-institutional competition and the decisions made within institutions alongside the external pressures they experience.

Students' Decisions to Apply

The first decision in the admission process, the decision to apply, rests with the student. Colleges and universities spend a great deal of time, money, and energy on marketing campaigns to respond more readily to the needs of their consumers: the students (Litten et al., 1983). How an institution describes itself through marketing materials is a direct medium through which the institution can affect a student's college choice (Chapman, 1981). Generally speaking, prospective students value information-rich, intensive college searches where they are able to learn a great deal of information about each of the institutions that interests them (Litten et al., 1983). Higher education has faced an admission marketing frenzy as prospective students consume college information at a rapid pace (McDonough, 1994).

As institutions seek to increase selectivity and prestige by growing applicant pools (Litten et al., 1983), marketing strategies employed in higher education increasingly mirror marketing strategies utilized in corporate fields. Per Litten et al. (1983), higher education institutions engage in one (or more) of four different marketing strategies. First, the institution can find students seeking benefits offered by the institution who are unaware of where these benefits may be found. Creating awareness of the benefits offered by the institution will attract this population of students. Second, the institution can find students who seek the benefits the institution offers, but who are getting them from another competing institution. In this case, the institution can seek

to provide better benefits than competitors, provide these benefits at a lower cost as compared to competitors, or facilitate greater access to the institutional benefits than competitors. Third, the institution can seek out benefits not currently provided anywhere in the market that are desired by students and aim to offer the benefits themselves. Fourth, an institution can seek to change the minds of prospective students to prefer the benefits the institution offers (Litten et al., 1983). None of these strategies is immediate, and different types of institutions may need to rely on varying combinations of marketing plans to encourage prospective students to apply.

Of course, to influence student application behavior, one must first understand (or seek to understand) student application behavior. Today, students are more willing to apply to colleges that are further away from home (Hoxby, 2009) and seek admission to elite institutions in greater numbers (Kilgore, 2009). College resources, study body characteristics, and the ideas of status and prestige drive students' application decisions in large part (Hoxby, 2009; Kilgore, 2009). Elite colleges continue to receive increasing numbers of applications (Kilgore, 2002), and students of all levels of academic ability apply to selective institutions at increasing rates (Bound et al., 2009). High-achieving, low-income students, who represent a highly desirable student population, tend not to apply to selective institutions and favor instead applying to non-selective colleges, despite the fact that elite institutions often offer larger financial aid packages (Hoxby & Avery, 2012).

The type of student an institution seeks undoubtedly influences the institution's marketing and application generation plan, as different types of students apply to college in different ways. While certainly a marketing-driven process, students' decisions about where to apply to college affects institutions in larger ways by affecting selectivity and prestige (Litten et al., 1983). Receiving more applications increases selectivity, which increases institutional

prestige, which serves to generate even more applications. This type of cycle makes clear why elite institutions tend to remain elite (or even grow more elite) over time. Prestige matters in this study because prestige matters to both students and institutions: students prefer to apply to and attend prestigious institutions, and knowing this, institutions seek to increase their own prestige (Cook & Frank, 1993; Hoxby, 2009; Kilgore, 2009).

Institutions' Decisions to Admit

The institution's decision to admit represents the second key decision in the admission process. A variety of literatures relate to this decision, ranging from affirmative action to percentage plans to test-optional admissions. However, the bulk of the literature relevant to this study relates to selectivity and prestige, since admitting high-quality students signifies an important step in eventually enrolling high-quality students. This prestige cycle (Cook & Frank, 1993; Hoxby, 2009; Kilgore, 2009) manifests itself in how institutions make admission decisions. This section addresses how institutions decide which students to admit.

Understanding how institutions decide which students to admit provides meaningful context to my study. Since I argue scholars programs are used to recruit high-achieving students, this discussion of decision rationale provides more understanding of how those decisions are made. What constitutes a high achieving student? Which students are the right fit for a particular institution? Whether relying on percentage plans, test scores, or other student characteristics, different institutions look at different criteria when evaluating students' candidacy for admission. In some institutions, observable factors like test scores and grade point averages are more important; while at other institutions, unobservable factors like motivation, ambition, and maturity are evaluated through the resumes and letters of recommendation students submit as part of their applications (Dale & Krueger, 2002). Elite, selective institutions have a greater

ability to control the characteristics of admitted students (Kilgore, 2009). While selectivity is typically achieved by producing more applications rather than changing admission criteria (Litten et al., 1983), selective institutions pride themselves on considering the academic and non-academic criteria of a student holistically (Kilgore, 2009). Though elite colleges are able to admit students based on their own institutional needs (Kilgore, 2009), these institutions point to the benefits of bringing together students who share similar capabilities in the classroom (Rothschild & White, 1993). Ultimately, elite, selective colleges may pursue institutional prestige as they see fit and have used their prestige to define admissibility and merit (Kilgore, 2009). For the most desirable students, merit aid is awarded to those students with the greatest record of and potential for success (Dale & Krueger, 2002). In some cases, elite institutions seek only to increase their own selectivity, and in others, elite institutions may broaden the definition of merit to include unobservable factors that may increase access for previously underrepresented student populations (Kilgore, 2009).

Of course, there is always concern among admission officers that strong candidates for admission will be overlooked or that the “wrong” students will be offered admission to an institution. On one end of this spectrum of errors, the mismatch hypothesis posits that minority students who attend more selective institutions will have lower graduation rates than their otherwise similar peers who attend institutions where their academic credentials are closer to the institutional average. Evidence of this mismatch hypothesis is mixed throughout the literature, with some evidence for its existence and other evidence discounting this hypothesis (Alon & Tienda, 2005; Smith et al., 2013). On the other end of the spectrum exist high-achieving, low-income students, whom selective institutions find very desirable but who are often difficult to locate in the admission process. This particular student population, if enrolled, can make a

student body more socioeconomically diverse without the risk of overmatching a student with institutional rigor (Hoxby & Avery, 2012). Proponents of holistic admission would point to their methods of considering observable and unobservable student characteristics as a means of ameliorating the effects of both of these types of errors (Dale & Krueger, 2002).

Ultimately, there is no true set of best practices for making admission decisions, and it is important to note that the complexities of admission decision-making increase as institutions receive applications from more prospective students (Rigol, 2003). Understanding such policies as affirmative action, percentage plans, and test-optional admission provides greater context for understanding the admission landscape, but each of these fades to background knowledge moving forward. Understanding the rationale behind admission decisions and how these decisions contribute to institutional status and prestige will continue to be relevant through the duration of this study since I argue that decisions about who gains admission to scholars programs are situated in a way that will increase institutional status and prestige. Organizational decision-making will be considered more broadly and theoretically later in this review of literature.

Students' Decisions to Enroll

Enrolling the correct number and type of students is, arguably, the ultimate goal of the admission process from the institutional perspective. A student's decision to enroll at a particular college or university represents the culmination of the college search process and is important to my study since I argue that scholars programs are used to drive high achieving students to enroll in institutions. Student college choice is influenced by students' own characteristics, institutional characteristics, institutional communication, feedback from influential people in the students' lives, educational aspirations, and expectations as to what the college experience will actually

entail (Chapman, 1981). College affordability, while not the focus of this study, also plays a role in a student's college choice. Affordability is a highly personalized concept that entails an individual determining whether a good, service, or action is within their financial grasp and whether or not the good, service, or action is worth the cost (McDonald & Calderone, 2006). With this in mind, students are more likely to attend institutions that offer them larger financial aid packages (Dale & Krueger, 2002). Ultimately, students are educational consumers, though parents and guardians are often involved in what can be considered a high-risk purchase of higher education. High-risk purchases are costly, personal, infrequent, and have very few alternatives (Litten et al., 1983).

Given the infrequency of higher education "purchases," colleges and universities compete with each other for top students in a tournament-style situation where students are equated to one another throughout the process (Cook & Frank, 1993). These top students, too, tend to move through the college search process earlier than many of their other peers, causing the institutions to compete even more aggressively for this population (Litten, 1982). Competition looks different among various institutional status levels, which is interesting for my study since I will compare two institutions and scholars programs at selective, private, well-resourced institutions to allow for more meaningful comparison. Elite institutions tend to recruit students nationally, while less selective institutions attract more students from within their own geographic regions. Institutions tend to compete for students within their own class of selectivity, rather than across categories (Rothschild & White, 1993). As high-achieving students tend to cluster in these elite, national institutions and institutions continue to compete with their peers, a cycle of prestige-building follows. The highest academic achievers find prestigious institutions the most attractive and enroll at these institutions in greater numbers, therefore increasing the

reputation of that institution, which causes additional high academic achievers? to behave in a similar way (Cook & Frank, 1993). Prestige matters to students, especially high-achieving students, which means it matters to institutions attempting to influence students' enrollment decisions. For this study, scholars programs represent one such means of influence.

Just as with students' decisions to apply and institutions' decisions to admit, there is a risk that institutions may miss out on desirable students or that students may overlook an institution they would be well suited to attend. Most undermatching, for example, occurs during a student's enrollment decision rather than any other point in the college process. When this happens, students are admitted to selective colleges but choose to attend one of the less selective institutions to which they were admitted (Smith et al., 2013). The students, rather than the admission offices, are most often the driving forces behind academic mismatch (Dillon & Smith, 2017). Since so many different factors contribute to a student's college decision, there are many points at which a decision can be influenced resulting in an academic mismatch. As an example related to my study, perhaps a less prestigious institution uses a scholars program to drive a student's enrollment decision away from a more prestigious institution that does not offer them access to a similar program. This concept will be explored more in my study, but I expect scholars programs could contribute to undermatching in some way.

Various statistics and institutional metrics may also contribute to a student's college enrollment decision. The term "yield" measures how many students are offered admission and the percentage of those who accept the offer. Yield serves as an indicator of how desirable an institution is perceived to be among its admitted students. However, a yield rate is not a true measure of selectivity (Avery et al., 2012), which is an important note for my subsequent discussion of institutional rankings. An institution can be desirable without being selective, and

vice versa. Regardless, many institutions tout their yield rates in an effort to encourage enrollment among students, as this particular statistic appears frequently in external assessments of colleges and universities (Monks & Ehrenberg, 1999). The reliance of many students on external factors like rankings, and the rankings institutions' reliance on statistics that serve as a proxy for status and prestige are of interest to my study since I argue scholars programs are used to boost and maintain institutional prestige. Indicators of status and prestige, perceived or real, drive the enrollment decisions of students.

The Role of Rankings

College rankings influence each of the three decisions in the college admission process above. Rankings impart prestige on universities and often influence students' enrollment decisions (Morse et al., 2020). Students use rankings to make admission decisions, and institutions care about rankings because they bring status and prestige. Rankings are essentially a currency and a resource sought out by institutions, which is why they are important to my study. *U.S. News and World Report* first issued college rankings in 1983, which was the first time college rankings had appeared in a national magazine (McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, & Perez, 1998). The inception of college rankings coincided with a national trend towards increased college selectivity in the 1980s (McDonough, 1994) and a general American interest in rankings of all kinds. American consumers of any sort of good or service view rankings as an unbiased source of information about something, use rankings to boost their own consumer confidence, and in equating rankings with reputation, use reputations to guarantee they are receiving a high-quality product (McDonough et al., 1998). During the college search process, prospective students feel that ranking systems give them more information with which to make an informed college decision (Bound et al., 2009).

Therefore, to understand how students make their college decisions, it is important to understand a few of the main sources of rankings and categorizations on which they rely. I will discuss my operationalization of these systems in Chapter 3, but for now, I will overview the literature related to some key ranking establishments. *U.S. News and World Report* and *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges* are two of the most popular and widely recognizable sources of college rankings in the United States. *Barron's* primarily measures school selectivity (Dale & Krueger, 2002; Hoxby & Avery, 2012), while *U.S. News and World Report* defines prestige based on student outcomes, faculty resources, expert opinions (i.e. peer rankings), and financial resources (Morse et al., 2020). *U.S. News and World Report* has been criticized for changing the way rankings are calculated, meaning an institution's rank could change drastically from year to year without the institution making any changes at all (McDonough et al., 1998; Morse et al., 2020). Given the amount of prestige that rankings can bring to institutions, those institutions that are focused on moving up the rankings have incentives to focus their resources on areas that can improve these rankings. In the case of *Barron's*, this would be selectivity, and in the case of *U.S. News*, an institution could choose to focus on things that would increase peer reputation, since this category comprises 20% of an institution's *U.S. News* ranking (Morse et al., 2020).

For all of the evidence that students rely on rankings when making their college decisions (Bound et al., 2009), rankings are still used more frequently by high-SES, high-achieving students whose parents have higher levels of education (McDonough et al., 1998). The rankings craze, it seems, feeds into the behaviors of those students who are already well represented in higher education. There is increasing competition for the nation's most selective institutions as they receive more and more applications for the same number of spots in their freshman classes each year (Alon & Tienda, 2005). While earning a degree from one of these highly-ranked,

selective institutions can serve as a signal of educational quality to future employers (Cook & Frank, 1993), the overall body of literature about prestigious, selective institutions produces conflicting evidence on the returns on attending this institutional type (Hoxby, 2009).

Regardless of how rankings are used, or their accuracy, these systems undoubtedly impact the decisions of students and institutions (Morse et al., 2020). As top students attend top ranked institutions, these students increase the prestige of the institutions they attend, therefore generating more applications and more enrollments from more top students in the future (Cook & Frank, 1993). This positive feedback loop, whether based on verifiable evidence or perceptions, creates a real stratification in the admission processes of higher education institutions. Though stratification may also be seen through such factors as resources or status conferred by athletic success (Lifschitz et al., 2014), considering prestige-based stratification is most important to my study since I argue that scholars programs are a way to drive high-achieving students to attend institutions. This idea is fundamentally related to rankings since they impart status and prestige on institutions.

Concluding Remarks on Admissions Literature

By understanding each of the three decisions that comprise the admission process, influences on those decisions, and the role of external rankings, it is possible to better understand the role that scholars programs play in the admission process. Furthermore, the key element of prestige that influences each decision remains important in each of the literatures that follows. In order to pursue prestige in admissions, colleges and universities can rely on several programs that target high-achieving students to influence their application and enrollment behavior. I discuss those programs, focusing on honors programs and scholars programs, in the next section.

Decision-Making

With no available literature on scholars programs, there is no systematic understanding of why colleges and universities decide to create these programs within their institutions. A better understanding of the research on institutional decision-making will inform knowledge of why scholars programs are created across the country, which is important to understand since institutional resources are being deployed for programs about which little is known. Bess and Dee (2012) stated that decisions are the essential transactions that occur within an organization. Additionally, each decision made, regardless of size or scope, is saturated with assumptions about the values and goals held by decision-makers and their organizations (Bess and Dee, 2012). In this vein, an institution's decision to create a scholars program says something about that institution's values, goals, and vision for the future. Thus, in addition to the reason above, this research can contribute to our understanding of how values, goals and vision are enacted via decision-making and the development of scholars programs.

The following section begins with an overview of the decision-making process and various models of decision-making. Rational choice decision-making, garbage can decision-making, resource dependency theory, and academic capitalism all represent ways decisions can be made in organizations. Each of these models is outlined in the section to follow. Three theories are applied more deeply to this particular study to understand anticipated drivers behind the creation of scholars programs. Garbage can decision-making, resource dependency theory, and academic capitalism help explain that scholars programs may be created as donor-driven initiatives, through status-seeking behavior, or as a means of pursuing and maintaining institutional prestige. I outline each in turn after a high-level overview of the most basic type of decision-making process. Understanding this wide variety of ways colleges and universities can

make decisions will better inform this study on scholars programs, which are currently an institutional enigma.

Overview of the Decision-Making Process

Before delving into more nuanced models of decision-making, it is helpful to have a baseline understanding of rational decision-making. Doing so will allow for deeper understanding of the models that will be applied to my study. At its most basic level, rational decision-making flows through a series of phases. First, decision-making bodies seek information to clearly identify the problem or issue at hand. Next, decision-makers will analyze the problem, determine which criteria will help them determine an optimal solution, and develop various alternatives that could potentially solve the problem. Then, decision-makers must evaluate the potential outcomes of each alternative before finally selecting and implementing a plan (Bess & Dee, 2012).

While the model above assumes a rational process, reality is often different from a clean, organized decision-making process. As each of the more detailed models of decision-making that follows will show, the process of organizational decision-making is not always simple and clear. For example, in higher education, there is often confusion surrounding which individuals, departments, or divisions are able to actually make decisions (Bess & Dee, 2012). Each model that follows places the decision-maker in a different role. Additionally, decision-makers demonstrate their power both when they make decisions and when they refrain from making decisions that could solve problems experienced by other, potentially less powerful, individuals or groups within their organization (Bess & Dee, 2012). Since confusion around decision-making in higher education is common, and since rational models rarely apply in actuality, the following

five models of decision-making are more relevant to a study occurring in the higher education landscape.

Models of Decision-Making

Various characterizations of decision-making and decision-makers can be seen differently in the literature on four key models of decision-making that follow. All of the models that follow developed in organizational theory and were applied to education research, with the exception of academic capitalism. The following sections outline rational choice decision-making, garbage can decision-making, resource dependency, and academic capitalism.

Rational Choice Decision-Making. The rational choice model of decision-making aligns most closely with the decision-making process discussed previously and is the starting point for understanding all models of decision-making that follow. This model assumes that organizations have goals and objectives and that their behavior is guided accordingly (Pfeffer, 1981). After identifying goals, actors will determine viable alternatives, assess each alternative or course of action, and select the alternative that offers them the greatest organizational value (Pfeffer, 1981). That rational choice model assumes goal congruence within the organization and allows for analysis of the effectiveness of outcomes (Pfeffer, 1981). Within the rational choice sphere, it is also important to consider the characteristics of an organization when moving through this process (Baldrige et al., 1977). Baldrige et al. (1977) characterized academic organizations as simultaneous bureaucracies, collegiums, and political organizations, which can lead to a great deal of ambiguity surrounding organizational goals. The rational choice model of decision-making, they say, plays out differently given the many different splintered groups that are found in academic organizations, though it can be found in some situations in higher education. In political organizations, for example, various groups of actors can put forth their own interests

and pressure governing bodies to make a particular decision (Baldrige et al., 1977). However, given the various organizational characteristics higher education can take on and the lack of goal clarity, this rational choice model of decision-making, in many ways, falls short. Each of the other models discussed in this study responds to the limitations of the rational choice model.

Garbage Can Decision-Making. Cohen, March, and Olson's garbage can model of decision-making (1972) classified decisions as outcomes based on three independent streams of organizations. The problem stream contains the concerns of individuals both within and outside of organizations. The solution stream consists of an answer or product, which under this model actively seeks a question to answer or a problem to solve. The participant stream includes individuals within an organization and notes that organizational participation is fluid (Cohen, et al., 1972). When making decisions in organizations characterized by this model, the process consists of problems and solutions being thrown into a sort of organizational garbage can by various participants within the process. Solutions may stick to participants; problems may stick to solutions; or participants may stick to problems (Cohen et al., 1972), leading to decisions that may seem arbitrary without an understanding of this decision-making model.

This model of decision-making proves relevant in higher education given the organizational structure of the field. Higher education has been classified as organized anarchy because of its fluid participation, unclear technology, and problematic preferences (Cohen et al., 1972). Understanding this type of organizational structure provides more color to the world in which decisions can be made in a garbage can model. Additionally, Weick (1976) characterized higher education institutions as loosely coupled systems where each department or unit either has little information on other units or chooses not to use the available information on those departments of units. In the garbage can model, problems and solutions are loosely coupled.

While problems can be solved, the solutions to which they are first attached are rarely the final decided upon solutions (Cohen et al., 1972). This loose coupling combined with the garbage can decision-making model explains why campus administrators often see situations unfold in manners that are confusing or unexpected (Weick, 1976). Making rational, informed decisions can become problematic since loosely coupled events are difficult to predict (Weick, 1976) and since the problems, solutions, and participants available in various organizational garbage cans vary greatly both within and among institutions (Cohen et al., 1972).

In considering scholars programs specifically, it is possible that garbage can theory could be at play in program creation or some of the ways in which scholars programs operate. For example, a donor could have come to an institution with an interest in founding a scholars program with a focus that may or may not align with the institution's broader goals. In this case, a "solution" of scholars programs would be attached to a "problem" that may not even exist from the institution's point of view, in line with garbage can decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972).

Resource Dependency. Resource dependency theory emerged around the same time as the garbage can model of decision-making. In 1974, Pfeffer and Salancik found that departmental power was significantly related to the ratio of budgetary resources received by that department. The core arguments of resource dependency, they stated, are that organizations rely on resources of many different types, resources come from the organization's environment, resources are a source of power, and that there is a direct connection between resource dependence and organizational power (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974). In their study, allocation of budgetary resources to departments and units was influenced by other elements in the organizational environment, which in the case of this study was seen in national rankings of department and outside research funding received (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974). In this higher

education example of resource dependency, as departments compete for resources, broader organizational behavior may become limited or constrained, but the interplay between power and resources is more prevalent in organizations situated in less competitive environments (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974).

Within higher education research, resource dependency appears in a variety of areas. Similar to the study conducted by Pfeffer and Salancik (1974), a study by Volk et al. (2001) found a number of factors contributed to the levels of resources received by various institutional departments. Departments that bring in more grant dollars, enroll more graduate students, are perceived to be high-quality, and tie closely to the institution's mission tend to receive higher levels of additional funding (Volk et al., 2001). Alternatively, departments that teach large numbers of undergraduates and have high student to faculty ratios received fewer additional funds (Volk et al., 2001). In essence, departments with more resources available had more power and received even more resources on top of what they already had, creating a cycle that seriously disadvantaged those under-resourced departments. Rosinger et al. (2016) found parallel results when institutions invested large sums of money into research programs, even further stratifying academic departments that bring in large amounts of grant funding. Once again, the external environment had the resources (federal research dollars) that made departments with more resources more powerful than departments with fewer resources (Rosinger et al., 2016).

Similar types of decision-making based on resources can be seen in staffing patterns throughout departments related to monetary resources. Tolbert (1985) found that more private institutions staffed positions related to private funding and more public institutions staffed positions related to public funding. For example, private institutions were more likely to have chief development officers, alumni relations directors, and admissions directors, since both

private donations and tuition payments represent large portions of private institution revenues (Tolbert, 1985). Public institutions, on the other hand, were more likely to employ individuals to serve as chief information officers, chief planning officers, and directors of institutional research to deal with news releases and media relations, external reporting, and government relations (Tolbert, 1985). In Tolbert's (1985) study, the departments with more control over institutional resources had more power, which is very much in line with resource dependency theory. The ideas of resource dependency can be seen through both faculty and staff lenses as evident in the studies cited here, but resource dependency does assume a fairly clear boundary between an institution and the external environment. Stated otherwise, the institution will take on similar characteristics to the main providers of external resources in the surrounding environment (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), be those donative funds, grant dollars, or tuition revenue.

Within the context of this study of scholars programs, resource dependency could be at play considering both dollars and students as resources. From the financial side, as with the garbage can decision-making section above, donative funds could be impacting the ways in which institutions are establishing scholars programs. From the perspective that high-achieving students are resources, resource dependency could impact the human resources and budgetary resources allocated to scholars programs in an effort to recruit a highly sought-after group of students to the institution. Furthermore, investing in this competitive group of students could allow an institution to increase its own status, which is another resource, albeit an intangible one.

Academic Capitalism. Academic capitalism, which is based on resource dependency theory, links higher education to the modern economy and creates an immersion of the corporate sector within higher education institutions (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The idea of academic capitalism assumes that the market drives higher education policy and that the United States

exists in a knowledge economy (McClure, 2016). Institutions are viewed as marketers in every phase of a student's journey under this theory (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). With prospective students, institutions look to drive high-achieving students to attend, and students seek to enroll in an institution that will serve as a good return on their investment. Enrolled students represent a captive market to purchase branded products and spend their dollars at institutional auxiliaries, and graduated students are seen as the output or product that institutions turn over to employers (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Upper-level administrators play a key role in pursuing an academic capitalism agenda (McClure, 2016), which can be characterized by a variety of behaviors. Examples of administrative academic capitalism include: creating infrastructure that supports economic development in surrounding areas, increased partnerships with outside corporations, engaging in activities that build the endowment and drive large donations, online education pursuits, intellectual property protections, ties to entrepreneurship in strategic plans and visions, spending resources on institutional branding and image control, and restructuring positions to allow for greater revenue generation ability among professionals (McClure, 2016). Extending the capacity of managerial roles that allow for such behaviors is a key tenet of academic capitalism (McClure, 2016), as is the creation of networks that link the institution and all of its actors to the new knowledge economy (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Academic capitalism can be seen in many instances where institutions begin behaving in a more market-focused manner. Jaquette (2012) found evidence of academic capitalism when colleges transition to become universities. This mission drift and retitling was seen in response to market and network factors, as colleges are more likely to become universities when others in their network have done so, when freshmen enrollments are declining, and when curricula have already started to become more comprehensive in nature (Jaquette, 2012). Older organizations

and organizations with strong market positions, however, were less likely to transition from colleges to universities. In an enrollment-driven economy, mission drift happens when enrollments decline (Jaquette, 2012). This idea is applicable to my study since I argue that scholars programs could be used to target a group of students beyond the institutions' traditional missions.

The use of postdoctoral fellows, too, invokes academic capitalism. Cantwell (2011) found that the use of international postdoctoral fellows was connected to a drive to increase academic production. This push for academic production represents market-driven behavior and therefore ties to academic capitalism (Cantwell, 2011). In another study of academic capitalism and pure academic foci of colleges and universities, Taylor et al. (2013) found research universities decrease institutional emphasis on the humanities as federal grant funding increased. Since these institutions received more funding for research-heavy fields, they responded to the market and de-emphasized areas with less revenue-generation capacity, representing a reliance on academic capitalism (Taylor et al., 2013). In my study, I argue that similar forces of academic capitalism could be at play if institutions choose to funnel more resources to a program like this that garners greater national prestige. The tenets of academic capitalism can also be seen in a more general analysis of how higher education in the United States relied on connections with for-profit corporations to adopt more market-driven behavior (Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012). In this study by Slaughter and Cantwell (2012), higher education institutions in the United States were seen becoming more market-focused when institutions and non-government, for-profit entities sought partnerships, especially in science and technology fields.

Looking at other institutional functions, collegiate athletics serve as yet another example of academic capitalism. Lifschitz et al. (2014) found that athletic conference membership is

related to athletic status and conferences tend to include groupings of schools with similar academic features. Conferences containing institutions with equal academic status tend to have more stable membership, and since conferences have differing levels of status, the goal for institutions seems to be gaining membership in a high-status conference (Lifschitz et al., 2014). This study complements the ideas behind why institutions invest so many financial resources into football programs; investing in football is investing in institutional reputation, and reputation and status matter in a market-driven higher education landscape (Lifschitz et al., 2014). In respect to scholars programs, I argue that similar forces could be at play. Perhaps institutions invest resources in scholars programs to increase their own reputation and status, since scholars programs seek to attract high-achieving students. In our current economy focused on prestige, knowledge, and market values (Lifschitz et al., 2014; McClure, 2016; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) academic capitalism serves to drive a number of institutional decisions.

Applications of Decision-Making to Scholars Programs

While rational choice decision-making is a valuable model, it will not be used in this study because there are other models that fit better into the scholars program study and larger admission-based problem of practice. I argue that scholars programs are not created through a rational choice model because this model assumes the identification of a problem, the analysis of potential solutions, and the eventual adoption of one of those solutions (Bess & Dee, 2012). I argue that scholars program creation is more complicated than this and is driven by one of three more complex forces I outline below. I argue that the idea of having many different forces at play in a potentially haphazard fashion makes garbage can decision-making an excellent model to explain the creation of scholars programs. I also expect resource dependency to play an important role in the creation of scholars programs since scholars programs involve financial

resources, student resources, faculty resources, and staff resources in a way that gives power to these arguably resource-laden programs (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974). Lastly, I argue that academic capitalism plays a key role in institutions' decisions to create scholars programs since competition for students and a concern for prestige indicate very market-focused behavior, as characterized by academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). I argue that garbage can decision-making, resource dependency, and academic capitalism all fit into the study at hand much more effectively and will be outlined below. The following discussion is informed by my definition of scholars program presented in Chapter 1 and centers around three expected drivers of the creation of scholars programs: donors, institutional striving, and the pursuit and maintenance of prestige, and how each of these drivers aligns with one or more of the selected models of organizational decision-making. Garbage can decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972) and resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974) are evident in my discussion of donors; academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) and resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974) inform my discussion of institutional striving; academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) frames my discussion of prestige.

The Role of Donors

Some scholars programs are created upon the receipt of restricted funds from a donor. As my study progresses, I expect that I will find many examples of this type of scholars program creation pattern. As an existing example, the Mork Family Scholars Program at the University of Southern California was created in 2011 with a \$110 million gift from donors Julie and John Mork (USC, 2021). Additionally, the Hunt Leadership Scholars Program at Southern Methodist University began in 1993 with a gift from Nancy Ann and Ray Hunt (SMU, 2021). Both of these programs appear to be donor-driven based on institutional information about their creation,

which parallels two different models of decision-making: resource dependency and garbage can decision-making.

Within higher education, garbage can decision-making has been cited in the areas of textbook publishing (Levitt & Nass, 1989) and state decentralization of higher education (McLendon, 2003), among other areas. In the case of donor-driven scholars programs, there is no evidence that USC or SMU sought funding specifically for the creation of a scholars program. The universities did not seek to solve a particular problem that led them to solicit funds from a donor to create a scholars program. The Hunt Leadership Scholars Program even states it came from the generosity and vision of the Hunt family (SMU, 2021). While scholars programs may eventually be used to solve specific institutional problems or meet specific institutional goals (the topic of this very study), their creation, in some cases, does seem to emerge from a garbage can. It is worth exploring this expected program driver as it presents an interesting way of understanding whether or not scholars programs are created with a certain institutional goal in mind. Perhaps, being donor-driven causes a scholars program to impact institutional goals, rather than having institutional goals impact a scholars program. Based on these examples of garbage can decision-making, I argue that donors may present an offer of funds to an institution with the specific goal of creating a scholars program, whether or not that institution originally saw a need for such a program.

Another model of decision-making, resource dependency, also applies to donor-driven scholars programs. While resource dependency has been applied to higher education through the study of academic department funding (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974; Rosinger et al., 2016; Volk et al., 2001) and through numbers of employees devoted to various institutional efforts (Tolbert, 1985), it is also evident in the case of donor-driven scholars programs. Not only are institutions

following the funding, so to speak, in these instances, but institutions also see the students in these scholars programs as resources to be recruited, retained, and graduated. Students and money can be viewed as resources, leading to clear evidence of resource dependency in donor-driven scholars programs. Under this decision-making model, I argue that institutions are seeking financial resources from the donors in their external environment, yet they must act according to the wishes of the holders of those resources. Or, on the student resources side, I argue that in an effort to garner more student resources, institutions create something that will allow them to collect (or enroll) more of this valuable resource.

Institutional Striving

In addition to impetus from donors, this study also argues that scholars programs are created by striving institutions to garner greater prestige. Applications of both resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974) and academic capitalism (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004) are seen in this proposed driver. Kezar and Maxey (2014) found that colleges and universities undertake this striving behavior to gain increasing funding and more resources, which is another direct nod to resource dependency. Mission statement changes, new branding and slogans, institutional policies and strategies, and budget priorities can all shift as colleges and universities seek to gain greater prestige (Kezar & Maxey, 2014). Resources and prestige do seem to be interrelated as institutions with more resources (financial, student, or otherwise) have greater prestige, legitimacy, and power within their networks, as evidenced through the application of resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974). In fact, prestige may be seen as one such resource when considering resource dependency theory.

Furthermore, resources can affect change within organizations in a variety of ways. Kraatz and Zajac (2001) applied resource dependency theory and found the most evidence that

resources serve as commitments within institutions. When organizations possess distinctive resources, they become more hesitant to change in response to the surrounding environment (Kraatz & Zajac, 2001). Though the researchers argued that having resources would facilitate organizational change, they actually found that organizations are less likely to change when they have more resources (Kraatz & Zajac, 2001). Furthermore, resource dependency theory showed that having resources did not necessarily help to buffer organizations from environmental factors or keep organizations from seeking out new learning. These reactions to resources have been noted in several studies in higher education and show how less-resourced institutions may be willing to engage in striving behavior (Kraatz & Zajac, 2001).

Putting resources towards a scholars program could represent one such application of this particular use of resource dependency theory. Scholars programs, this study argues, may be created to help institutions gain legitimacy and other resources. As one example, Appalachian State University, which is a less-resourced institution, created the Wilson Scholars Program in 2013. While still named for a donor, the Wilson Scholars Program seeks students who were ranked at the top of their high school class, who pursued a rigorous curriculum, and who have demonstrated a commitment to leadership and service (Appalachian State University, 2021). By seeking students above their institutional profile, I argue that Appalachian State is engaging in striving behavior by channeling resources towards these high-caliber students. It is important to note, especially in cases of striving institutions, that while the system of reacting to monetary support seems like a rather simple mentality, it may present problems for institutions of higher education. When considering resource dependency theory, public institutions especially, which rely on multiple funding sources, face conflicting demands tied to various resources to which they must respond (Gumport, 1993). Relying on resource dependency theory in this particular

study, I argue that creating a scholars program will allow institutions to strive to enroll a group of students they may not have otherwise enrolled.

Additionally, academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) also applies to institutions creating scholars programs when they are striving. The idea of academic capitalism has become prevalent in causing institutions to change, despite the fact that higher education has often been viewed as a change-averse industry (Kezar & Maxey, 2014). Since academic capitalism views institutions as marketers (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), striving institutions, under this theory, would create scholars programs to become more competitive, to behave more like the peers they want to emulate, and to build their brand as an exceptional university. I argue that academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) could lead to the creation of scholars programs for the simple purpose of finding a new way to market an institution to high-achieving students, therefore allowing that institution to enroll the highest quality students possible. There are elements of both academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) and resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974) at play in the consideration of institutional striving as a potential driver of scholars program creation.

The Pursuit and Maintenance of Prestige

Those highest academic achieving students are attracted to the colleges and universities with the greatest prestige, best reputations, and most successful record of enrolling similarly talented students (Cook & Frank, 1993). Additionally, once an institution generates prestige, it must work to maintain this valuable commodity (Kilgore, 2009). Becoming a prestigious institution is only part of the battle in recruiting top students; maintaining prestige is almost as much, if not more, work. The quest for prestige can be at least partially explained by the idea of academic capitalism, which presents itself in higher education as a more corporate-like

philosophy where institutions pursue prestige through selectivity, increased research, and access to additional resources (Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Colleges and universities seeking prestige most certainly behave in a more market-driven manner, which is supported by the tenets of academic capitalism.

The pursuit of prestige through academic capitalism in higher education has been studied in terms of institutional transition from college to university (Jaquette, 2013), football conference membership (Lifschitz, Sauder, & Stephens, 2014), and how institutions set their prices (Askin & Bothner, 2016). The study on pricing is particularly interesting. Askin and Bothner (2016) found that institutions set their tuition rates higher after a noteworthy decline in national ranking. Their study shows that colleges and universities do respond to status losses, and an increase in price represents one way institutions work to recoup such losses (Askin & Bothner, 2016). Institutions with a wide appeal among college applicants and with a more expensive set of peer institutions were more likely to react to status loss with a price increase (Askin & Bothner, 2016), again showing a linkage between higher education and a more modern economy, which is supported by the theory of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

This study also argues that scholars programs emerge and remain in prestigious institutions as a manner of maintaining that prestige. In considering two examples, I expect that this prestige maintenance explains both why UNC continues to operate its scholars program, the Morehead-Cain Scholars Program, and why the University of Texas at Austin (UT) created its own program, the Forty Acres Scholars Program, in 2014 (The University of Texas at Austin, 2021). I would posit that UNC first created the Morehead-Cain Scholars Program to build prestige and legitimacy, but now must continue to operate the program to maintain the prestigious ideal the institution enjoys today. Additionally, I would argue that UT decided to

create the Forty Acres Scholars Program as a method to maintain the prestige the institution already has, since other such prestigious institutions also have scholars programs. The decisions in both of these examples are market-driven and allude strongly to the ideas put forth by academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Whether through pricing, athletics, or scholars programs, academic capitalism thinks of institutions of higher education as marketers at every point in a student's journey (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Academic capitalism represents a fundamental shift in how colleges and universities operate that seems to pervade institutional operations, especially in the context of this study that includes a focus on highly desirable high-achieving students.

Concluding Remarks on Decision-Making

As rational choice decision-making, garbage can decision-making, resource dependency, and academic capitalism have shown, organizations can rely on many different models to guide decision-making. Many of the newer models of decision-making serve to address gaps and issues seen in previous models, though garbage can decision-making, resource dependency, and academic capitalism prove most relevant for this study since they tie to the three expected origins of scholars programs I discuss.

Despite the many different ways in which decisions are made in higher education, Bess and Dee (2012) advised that individuals and organizations should consider the type of problem at hand and the skillset of the group involved before determining how a decision should be made. Sometimes, a single individual may follow a rational choice process to make a decision. Other times, one department may rely on logics employed by another department to implement organizational change. Still other times, a problem and solution may seem to be entirely out of alignment as the result of an organizational garbage can.

This study argues that donors, institutional striving, and the pursuit of prestige have driven the creation of scholars programs. At the macro-level I argue that scholars programs are created to attract high achieving students to institutions. By looking at each of the highlighted scholars program drivers, my expectations become more specific. I argue that garbage can decision-making and resource dependency theory explain why donors drive institutions to create scholars programs they may not have created otherwise. I argue that resource dependency and academic capitalism explain why institutional striving leads to the creation of scholars programs, as institutions seek to collect more resources in the forms of students, funding, and legitimacy. I argue that academic capitalism on its own explains why the pursuit of prestige drives institutions to create scholars programs since programs like these are appealing to the high-quality students institutions seek to enroll. Each of these three expected drivers is impacted by one or more models of decision-making, which are explored further over the course of the study. While there is no research to date on why scholars programs have emerged, these models of organizational decision-making will help to inform research and test expectations in this unexplored area.

Conclusion

Scholars programs can be better understood by knowledge of the admission cycle, honors programs, and organizational decision-making theories. Each of these bodies of literature lays the framework for my study of scholars programs, currently only documented by primary institutional documents. As the ideas of status, prestige, and institutional goals permeate each of these literatures, I will delve further into each in my study design.

Data and Methods

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the approach taken to evaluate why scholars programs² are created, what they do, and the roles they play in helping institutions meet broader goals. Specifically, this study sought to answer three research questions: why scholars programs are formed, how scholars programs operate, and what roles they play in helping institutions meet their broader goals. To do so, I utilized a holistic, multi-case study design to study six dimensions of scholars programs at two institutions. Both cases were selected because they represent typical scholars programs at private, mid-sized, selective institutions. I sought out typical scholars programs at two similarly structured institutions since the six=dimension framework I developed included typical dimensions of scholars programs. I relied on interviews and document analysis to collect my data, and the reasoning behind these decisions is outlined in the sections that follow.

Based on organizational decision-making literature discussed in the previous chapter, I have argued that there are three drivers of the creation of scholars programs. First, donors may drive the creation of scholars programs through either garbage can decision-making (Cohen, March, & Olson, 1972) or resource dependency (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974). Seeing names like Hunt, Morehead, and Cain on scholars programs led me to believe there could be donative forces at hand. However, the donative forces may not have been solicited to solve a specific problem at the institution (garbage can decision-making) or may be driving the decisions made at institutions (resource dependency). Second, institutional striving could lead to the creation of scholars programs, as evidenced by resource dependency (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974) and

² I define a scholars program as a program (a) to which students must apply, (b) that operates across academic boundaries of an institution, (c) that is operative by the university, not by students, and (s) that focuses around a specific student quality or interest.

academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Particularly at a more middle-status institution (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001), I argue that attracting high-achieving students could be seen by striving institutions as a means of increasing their status. Since an institution's status is a resource to be cultivated and maintained (Kilgore, 2009), resource dependency also applies to decisions related to institutional striving, as does academic capitalism since the concept of academic capitalism helps explain institutional striving as a market-driven phenomenon (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Lastly, scholars programs may emerge as institutions seek to create and maintain prestige, as supported by the theory of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Prestige is difficult to obtain and even more costly to maintain (Kilgore, 2009), which could motivate institutions of varying status types to create and maintain scholars programs. Both status and prestige matter when studying scholars programs because enrolling high-achieving students, like those sought out by scholars programs, plays a key role in driving institutional status and prestige (Cook & Frank, 1993; Hoxby, 2009; Kilgore, 2009). Though other program drivers may exist, I have chosen to focus on these three given their potential applicability to the cases I have selected and the ties to decision-making literature.

Researcher Positionality

Before delving further into my study methodology, including case design and selection, I need to describe my own researcher positionality, as this was critically important to executing my study. First, I have spent a decade working with scholars programs, and have served as a scholars program director for the last eight years. Through my professional role, I have frequently compiled best practices data on scholars programs at peer institutions, and I have interacted with other scholars program directors through our professional organization, the

Undergraduate Scholars Program Administrator Association (USPAA). Overall, much of the initial thought process behind this study was driven by my own experiences and positionality.

Second, my positionality allowed me to access both of my cases. I was able to gain access to one institution thanks to an introduction made by one of my committee members to a colleague. This colleague was able to connect me to the program director, who in turn made introductions to a wide variety of scholars program staff and partners across the university. Furthermore, I had access to the second institution due to my own connections as an alumna and previous employee of that institution. I was not a member of the scholars program being studied, but I was already familiar with the program director and other university staff due to my time as both a student and staff member. While I recognize that this type of connectivity to a case is not necessarily ideal, it was necessary due to the research complications created by COVID-19. Many higher education professionals were working remotely and taking on larger workloads during summer 2020, when I was collecting my data, so I had to rely on existing relationships and trust to gain access to two cases that were well-suited for my study of scholars programs. Ultimately, the trust inherent to these relationships with my research participants allowed me to collect robust data and study dimensions of scholars programs in a meaningful way, which was highly beneficial to my study.

In the sections that follow, I outline the steps I took as part of this study, which served to evaluate these expectations. Specifically, below I discuss the study design, definitions and operationalization of key terms, and more thoroughly justify my methods of data collection and analysis. I also outline study limitations and my methods for ensuring the trustworthiness of my data.

Study Design

Using a holistic, multi-case design, which is well-suited for studying more complex, emerging phenomena, allowed me to most effectively study scholars programs (Yin, 2003). I studied multiple dimensions (e.g., program mission and goals) of each program and each institution, which allowed for a more complete picture of the events and circumstances associated with my two cases. Furthermore, the data I collected was not available through a single source of data collection. Instead, I first relied on interviews to learn more about program operations, selection processes, and what students do in scholars programs. I supplemented this with documents to provide me with historical information about scholars programs and requirements and expectations of students in scholars programs. A case study design allowed for the collection of data from multiple sources, which was necessary for me to obtain the type of rich, holistic data needed for my exploratory study of scholars programs. (Yin, 2003). Additionally, a holistic, multi-case study design allowed me to compare findings related to six program dimensions, to be discussed later in this chapter, across both cases since I collected congruent pieces of evidence on each scholars program (Yin, 2003). As discussed in the case selection section of this chapter, comparing findings across two typical scholars programs is highly beneficial for improving understanding of this previously unstudied facet of higher education.

Given the wide variety of data collected from many different sources, a case study design was best suited to study scholars programs and answer the three research questions included in this project (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003). Combining the data from document analysis and interviews provided a full picture of both sides of the conceptual model that guided the study and began to elucidate how the two sides of this model interact. An interview with a scholars program director or other administrator was necessary to learn the stories of the scholars

programs and hear from professionals who are working directly or indirectly with scholars programs regularly in their work (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). These interviews were then combined with documents obtained at both the program and institution-level to create a rich corpus of data for each case (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Document analysis on its own allowed for the collection of historical data and information about scholars programs that is shared with the public on websites (Merriam & Tisdale). However, on its own this does not provide the opportunity for clarification, probing questions, or collecting data that may not be published at various institutions. The strengths of relying on documents pair nicely with the focus of my study. Documents are effective when studying historical phenomena and are extremely helpful because they often predate the individuals who are working on the scholars programs now (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Interviews, on the other hand, helped me capture stories about the scholars programs, understand how program administrators and other university personnel interpret the programs themselves, and speak with the people who know the most about each of these programs (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). A case study design allowed me to combine the two data collection methods necessary to answer my exploratory research question (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003).

Case Selection

For each of the aforementioned reasons, I chose to engage in a holistic study of two scholars programs at two private, mid-sized, selective institutions, the names of which have been blinded for the purposes of this study: the Presidential Scholars Program at Oscar University and the Newman Scholars Program at Academy University. It is important to note here that the scholars programs are the cases in this study, not the institutions. I recognize that, based on the institutional profiles provided below, neither of the institutions referenced in this study is typical.

Selective, private, well-resourced institutions with stable enrollment are not typical, but the scholars programs, in my professional opinion, are. Selecting these two typical programs as my cases was appropriate for this study because selecting only one case would not have allowed me to draw as many broad conclusions and allow for as much transferability as does the use of two cases (Yin, 2003). Additionally, since I sought to study each case in great depth, selecting more than two cases would have become cumbersome. Two cases allowed for both great depth and a point of comparison across scholars programs both deemed to be typical programs based on my own professional expertise (Yin, 2003).

In selecting my two cases, I utilized a purposive sampling technique (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016) to identify institutions that share some commonalities and were home to typical scholars program. Academy University and Oscar University are both private institutions, so their budgets are tuition dependent; they are both mid-sized, enrolling similar numbers of students and employing similar numbers of faculty and staff; and they are both selective, although Academy University more so than Oscar University. Furthermore, both institutions are well-resourced. Based on the institutional profiles I include in the next section, I argue that both of these institutions have, either currently or in the somewhat recent past, engaged in the pursuit of prestige and institutional striving behavior. I argue that pursuing and maintaining prestige drives institutions to make decisions about scholars programs, as outlined in Chapter 2, since increasing and maintaining prestige is a critical factor in recruiting high-achieving students and vice versa (Cook & Frank, 1993; Hoxby, 2009; Kilgore, 2009). Selecting institutions that have undergone striving behavior, or are currently experiencing such behavior, and are seeking and maintaining prestige aligns with two of my proposed drivers of scholars program creation outlined in Chapter 2.

Institutional Profiles

The following institutional profiles of Academy University and Oscar University outline their history, student breakdown, mission, and current strategic plan. I also include data from annual reports, where available. Table 1 summarizes much of this information along with a brief overview of each institution's scholars program.

Academy University. Academy University was founded in the mid-1800s by a pastor and a wealthy local entrepreneur who saw the need for more institutions of higher education in their growing Midwest town. Today, Academy University enrolls just over 16,000 students, approximately 8,000 of whom are undergraduates, on its picturesque campus just outside the main urban center of the city. The institution's mission focuses on the creation and sharing of knowledge in a way that promotes creative inquiry. Within the total student population, approximately half are white and half represent racial and ethnic minorities. Most of Academy University's undergraduate students pursue degrees in the liberal arts and sciences.

Academy University is highly selective, admitting around 15% of students who apply. Within this group of admitted students, the middle the average ACT score is approximately 34 and the average SAT score is around 1500. These indicators of academic quality and other campus statistics led *U.S. News and World Report* to rank Academy University in the top 25 in its National Universities list (U.S. News & World Report, 2021). *Barron's* classifies Academy University as most competitive (Barron's, 2021). While Academy University touts a great deal of prestige now, the early 2000s were a time of rapid growth in selectivity and prestige for the institution.

As the institution continues to look forward, it has set a number of strategic priorities that focus on making the research conducted at the university applicable to society. While the

institution itself does not have a published strategic plan, the Division of Student Affairs and other areas of the university are currently engaged in their own plans. The Division of Student Affairs plan, which I relied on in my study, coheres around remaining student-focused and fostering a collaborative, inclusive, and entrepreneurial division culture. Academy University's most recent capital campaign ended in the late 2010s and focused on raising scholarship dollars for students. Additional information about size, selectivity, and the Newman Scholars Program itself can be found in Table 1 below.

Oscar University. Oscar University was founded in the late 1800s in a residential area of a large city in the south. Currently, Oscar University enrolls just over 11,000 students, 9,500 of whom are undergraduates. Within the undergraduate student population, approximately two thirds are white and one third represent racial and ethnic minorities. The majority of students pursue degrees in business or a science or engineering field.

Oscar University enrolls about 2,200 first-year students and 500 transfer students as undergraduates annually. On average, Oscar University admits 45% of the students who apply, and these students earn an average ACT score of 28 and an average SAT score of 1280. Given these indicators, *Barron's* ranks Oscar University as highly competitive (Barron's, 2021). U.S. News and World Report ranked Oscar University in the top 100 of its list of National Universities for the 2021 rankings year (U.S. News & World Report, 2021).

Oscar University displays its current strategic plan on an interactive website, and the plan both recognizes the institution's achievements up until now and points out areas for strong growth. In looking at growth, Oscar University seeks to better support students, provide a holistic college experience for students, and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at greater levels. The institution proudly refers to itself as a bit of an underdog; a university that has

worked hard to exceed the expectations set by others. Based on this strategic plan, the university has undergone recent growth, both in the study body and campus sizes, and has climbed the national rankings rapidly over the past decade. Relatedly, Oscar University is in the public phase of a capital campaign to raise \$1 billion to support these goals. Table 1 below outlines a few additional details of both of my cases, as well as the scholars programs housed within each institution, the Newman Scholars Program at Academy University and the Presidential Scholars Program at Oscar University.

Table 1 <i>Selected cases: Institutions and scholars programs</i>		
Dimension	Academy University	Oscar University
General Location	Urban, Midwest	Urban, South
Institution Founded	Mid-1800s	Late-1800s
Undergraduate Enrollment- Fall 2021	8,000	9,500
Total Enrollment- Fall 2021	16,000	11,000
Endowment Size	\$8.5 billion	\$1.75 billion
Barron's Classification	Most competitive	Highly competitive
U.S. News Ranking	Top 25	Top 100
Admit Rate	15%	40%
Average SAT	1500	1280
Average ACT	34	28
Carnegie Classification	R1: highest research activity	R2: high research activity
Scholars Program Name	Newman Scholars Program	Presidential Scholars Program
Program Created	1998	1968 (scholarship only)
Average Cohort Size	18	55
Program Staff Size	2	1
Program Office Location	Lawrence Women's Building	McConaughy Administration Building

Case Selection Summary. Both Academy University and Oscar University are private institutions located near urban areas that enroll a similar number of undergraduate students. Oscar University is clearly undertaking measures to improve its status and prestige based on the goals set out by its strategic plan and capital campaign, while Academy University appears to be maintaining a greater degree of consistency with its already prestigious status based on its own indicators. Based on the descriptions provided above, it could be said that Oscar University is

engaging in institutional striving. Academy University appears to have done so in the early 2000s. While the rankings and prestige levels differ between the two institutions, it is important to note that they were selected for this study because they house fairly typical scholars programs. By understanding the origins and goals of both Academy University and Oscar University outlined above, I will be able to better understand how each institution's fairly typical scholars program is utilized to meet broader institutional goals.

Conceptual Framework

Multiple qualitative data techniques, namely interviews and document analysis, were necessary to determine why scholars programs are created, how they operate, and how they are utilized to meet institutional goals. Document analysis is helpful when there are written records, either contemporary or historical, related to the phenomenon of study, as is the case with these programs (O'Leary, 2017). Interviews are an effective data collection technique for capturing an individual's assessment of the phenomenon to be studied (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). As detailed later in this section, each of these two collection methods was suitable for addressing all six of the dimensions of scholars programs I included in the study.

Table 2 summarizes the six dimensions of scholars programs on which I collected data through document analysis and interviews over the course of this study. As discussed earlier in this chapter, my own professional experiences informed the creation of these dimensions in a very strong way. Through cursory studies of best practices and my professional interactions, I have found that scholars programs have six key dimensions in common. I relied on those six dimensions to frame my study of scholars programs.

Some dimensions, like cohort size and structure, resources associated with program, and scholarship funds offered to students, yielded more numerical, specifically measurable results.

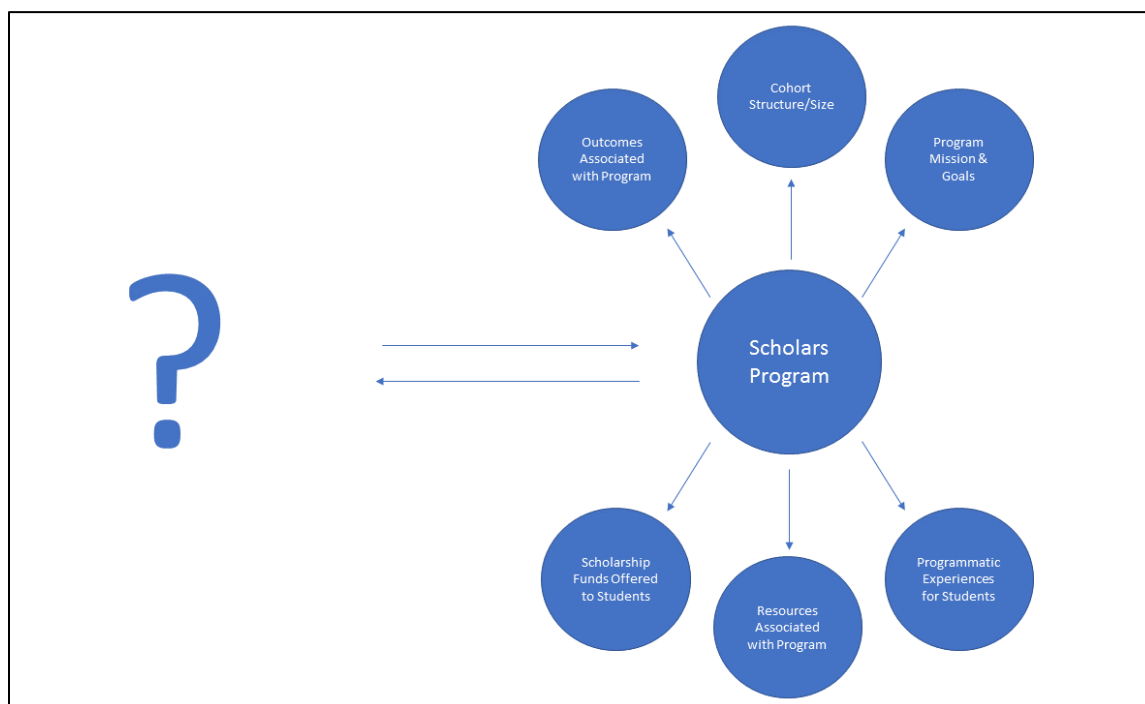
Other dimensions, like program outcomes, program mission and goals, and programmatic experiences for students, elicited descriptive data. All six of the dimensions identified tie back to my definition of a scholars program and my research questions that seek to understand why scholars programs are created, how they operate, and how they are utilized to meet broader institutional goals. While each of the dimensions is focused heavily on explaining how scholars programs operate, some dimensions begin to provide insight into my first and third research questions as well. Program mission and goals, for example, can help explain why scholars programs are created and how they are used to meet institutional goals. Since this is an exploratory study, each of these dimensions helped me to better understand scholars programs. The list of dimensions, which my professional experience led me to believe would be beneficial, did prove to be important to understanding both cases in my study.

Table 2 <i>Definitions of program dimensions to be considered</i>		
Dimension	Definition	Research Questions Addressed
Outcomes associated with program	any learning or development outcomes specifically stated for students participating in the program	2
Cohort structure/size	the number of students accepted to each incoming cohort, how they are selected and requirements for selection	2, 3
Program mission and goals	stated purpose or aims of the program, or unstated goals under which the program functions	1, 2, 3
Programmatic experiences for students	shared experiences the students in the program participate in together, required or optional	2
Resources associated with program	staff associated with program, rather directly or indirectly, financial resources, and prestige utilized as a resource	2
Scholarship funds offered to students	variations on funding options made available to students, whether tuition or otherwise	2, 3

The conceptual model in Figure 1 below displays the six dimensions in a different format. Each dimension stems from the large numbers of scholars programs I have studied in a more practical way and my own professional experience as a scholars program director. The two-way arrows between this scholars program bubble and the question mark represent the fact

that we do not have a full understanding of how scholars programs impact institutional goals or how institutional goals impact scholars programs. While the question mark does represent a relative unknown, I argue that it could be explained in a few different ways. First, the question mark could represent an institution's overall goals, and the arrows a two-way relationship between scholars programs and institutional goals. Second, the question mark could represent any of my three proposed drivers of scholars program creation: donors, institutional striving, or the pursuit and maintenance of prestige could each be involved in a two-way relationship with scholars programs. Both Table 2 and Figure 1 helped guide my study provide a broader context for the choices I made regarding data collection and analysis. Next, I will discuss each dimension in turn before turning to the two methods of data collection in this study, document analysis and interviews.

Figure 1: Conceptual model of study



Outcomes Associated with Program. This program dimension sought to understand student learning and development outcomes associated with the scholars program. Some of these outcomes are stated on public documents like websites, strategic plans, or annual reports, and other outcomes are kept in a more internally facing format. For example, I used interviews to ask questions about what program directors hoped students would get out of their experience in the scholars program. I looked for both these more formalized outcomes and more unofficial intended outcomes in both of my data collection techniques. I argue that understanding program outcomes is important because in learning about student outcomes, I learned about what each scholars program seeks to accomplish, and therefore, what program administrators view as the programs' purpose. The dimension helped answer my second research question about how scholars programs operate and my third research question about how scholars programs are utilized to meet institutional goals.

Cohort Size and Structure. Cohort size and structure are related to the number of students in each cohort of scholars and the methods by which they are recruited and selected. Public records data like websites and selection process materials collected during document analysis (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016) provide detailed information about cohort size and demographics. However, I did need to ask program directors and staff about the more detailed structural components of how students are selected to be a part of the scholars programs. Good interview respondents can be thought of as informants or storytellers (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016), and I asked each interview participant to tell me the story of how students come to be scholars in these programs. I argue that cohort size and cohort structure are important because they elucidate the type of students each scholars program seeks to recruit and the impact the program can have on campus, with more students in scholars programs leading to a greater impact by that program

on campus culture. In essence, this dimension tells us how administrators define high-achieving students in the case of their program, thus getting to the questions of why scholars programs exist and how they operate.

Program Mission and Goals. Program mission and goals were both clearly stated and more unofficially known and followed by scholars program staff. To locate the program goals, I relied on analysis of documents like program websites and institutional or divisional strategic plans, which tend to contain this kind of high-level data. Program directors and other upper-level administrators were the best sources of information for the actual lived goals of each scholars program. The interviews themselves were semi-structured, and I was able to gain access to information that is not public facing from the people who know the most about these scholars programs (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). I argue that understanding program missions and goals will also inform all three research questions and elucidate the reasoning behind the creation of scholars programs, what they do, and the interplay between these programs and broader institutional goals.

Programmatic Experiences for Students. This program dimension relates to what students do as members of the scholars program. Do they take courses together? Do they participate in professional development opportunities? What kinds of cocurricular experiences are offered and/or required of the scholars? While I envisioned an analysis of program calendars to be the best method of studying this particular program dimension, neither of the cases was keeping a program calendar. I am not sure if this was due to the disruption of events due to COVID-19, or if this is simply not a practice in which the programs engage. Therefore, during interviews with program staff, I asked questions about the various events in which scholars engage to understand the programmatic benefits offered to the scholars. Programmatic

experiences for students are varied but play an important role in the operation of scholars programs, therefore serving to answer my second research about how scholars programs operate.

Resources Associated with Program. This dimension allowed for more learning about the level of resources each institution invests in its scholars program. Resources in this case included human resources, financial resources, and the classification of prestige as a resource. Some information about program staff and reporting structure was available through documents like websites, which allowed me to see information like staff names and titles. However, in the interviews I asked questions about how the entire team works together to operate the scholars program to better understand the roles each person plays, how campus partnerships operate, and the types of financial resources made available to scholars program. Speaking to individuals across the institution who interface with scholars programs allowed for collection of many perspectives on the programs and determine how multiple offices work together to operate scholars programs. Since prestige is also viewed as a resource, part of this dimension relates to the prestige a scholars program can bring to an institution, both internally with student members and externally in relation to institutional reputation. Resources are a strong indicator of the level of importance an institution associates with a program (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974), so this particular dimension was important to understanding how scholars programs operate and whether or not the scholars program is a high institutional priority and how valuable it is in helping the institution meet its broader goals.

Scholarship Funds Offered to Students. Scholarship funds are offered to students in scholars programs as regular semester tuition, room and board funding, and study abroad or travel funding. I sought to learn which types of funding are offered to the students who are members of each of the two scholars programs in my study. cursory research proved that

programs proudly tout this kind of information on their program websites, though additional information was available through interviews with program staff. I also asked program directors and staff about the financial benefits related to housing and travel received by students in the program. As with each of the other five dimensions, a combination of document analysis and interview data was necessary for holistic data collection. Scholarship funds are a more specific example of resources contributed to a scholars program, so this was be an important dimension to study to better understand the utilization of resources in relation to scholars programs and how those programs operate.

Program Dimensions Summary. As outlined in Table 2 and Figure 1, each of the six dimensions of scholars programs studied served to answer the three research questions included in this study: first, why scholars programs are created, second, how scholars programs operate, and third, what role they play in helping institutions meet their broader goals. By learning more about the outcomes associates with programs, cohort size and structure, program mission and goals, programmatic experiences for students, resources associated with the program, and scholarship funds associated with the program, I was able to better understand each of my designated research questions. Furthermore, I relied on two methods of data collection to do so: document analysis and interviews with program directors and other key university personnel.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is an effective method of data collection when there are written records about a particular area of study (O’Leary, 2017), as there are with scholars programs. Some documents were contemporary, outlining what is happening now with the programs, and others were historical, predating the individuals I spoke with during interviews. Documents are especially helpful in situations where interviewees are newer to their roles interacting with the

program (O’Leary, 2017). I began my search for documents with scholars program websites and institutional websites looking for things like strategic plans and scholar selection timelines. However, I also had to rely on program administrators and university archivists to gain access to documents that may not be available online, such as historical documents relating to the Presidential Scholars Program. Both public records data (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016) and historical documents provided insightful findings related to both cases.

The documents I collected, both on my own or with the assistance of individuals within the universities, answered all three research questions and mapped directly onto the six program dimensions identified for this study. First, program websites, historical founding information about the programs, and strategic plans for the institutions were helpful because they answered the research question about why scholars programs are created. Some of these items, like strategic plans, were available online and others, like historical documents, had to be collected with assistance from various persons within the institutions. Second, analyzing student recruitment materials and program websites that described selection processes helped to answer the research question that asked how scholars programs operate. Finally, documents like strategic plans and annual reports, as well as documents like scholar selection process guidelines and student recruitment materials, served to answer the third research question of how scholars programs interact with institutional goals. A full list of documents I relied on during my study can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 <i>Documents utilized in study</i>		
Document Type	Case Where Available	Program Dimension(s) Addressed
Admission office website	Academy University	Cohort structure and size, program mission & goals, scholarship funds offered to students
Application reader guidelines	Academy University	Cohort structure and size, program mission & goals, scholarship funds offered to students
Awardee letter	Oscar University	Cohort structure and size, program mission & goals, scholarship funds offered to students

Division of Student Affairs strategic plan	Academy University	Program mission & goals
Historical scholarship brochure	Oscar University	Program mission & goals, scholarship funds offered to students
Institutional strategic plan	Oscar University	Program mission & goals
Interview day information for finalists	Academy University, Oscar University	Cohort structure and size, program mission & goals, scholarship funds offered to students
Letter of commitment for awardees	Academy University	Cohort structure and size, program mission & goals, scholarship funds offered to students
Program anniversary website	Academy University	Program mission & goals, resources associated with program
Program website homepage	Academy University	Program mission & goals, programmatic experiences for students
Scholarship award letter	Academy University, Oscar University	Cohort structure and size, program mission & goals, resources associated with program, scholarship funds offered to students
Student newspaper article	Oscar University	Program mission & goals, scholarship funds offered to students
Yearbook article	Oscar University	Program mission & goals, scholarship funds offered to students

As indicated in Table 3, each of the documents I collected and analyzed served to inform my understanding of one or more of my six program dimensions. Strategic plans and annual reports for institutions helped me learn more about the outcomes associated with each scholars program. Student profiles and frequently asked questions documents about the programs' application processes helped me understand more about their cohort sizes and structures. Program websites shed light on program mission and goals, while event descriptions and student highlights told me more about programmatic experiences for students. Program staff lists and published funding descriptions online provided more information about the various types of resources associated with the scholars programs. Finally, published information on program websites and promotional materials for the programs further explained the scholarship funds and benefits offered to students through each program.

At the conclusion of document collection, I realized that the bulk of documents obtained were websites and student recruitment and selection materials, coupled with some historical

documents from Oscar University. These documents were informative and helpful to the study, but they did not tell the entire story of scholars programs. For example, Academy University did not have the same type of historical information in document form, and websites did not contain as much information about programmatic experiences for students as I anticipated. Fortunately, I was able to rely on a second type of data collection to supplement the somewhat limited availability of documents. By pairing document analysis and interviews together in a comparative case study format (Yin, 2013), I was able to address the three research questions and study the six program dimensions in the most thorough manner possible.

Interviews

Interviews were an appropriate data collection method to answer the three research questions and study the six program dimensions because I was able to speak with the individuals working most closely with the phenomenon of study and collect their expert assessments on this emerging area of higher education (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). I began my search for interview participants by speaking with the director of each scholars program selected as a case. I was able to gain access to these individuals through my own network as a scholars program director and the networks of my dissertation committee members. From there, I was able to use a purposive sampling technique to interview other university administrators, faculty, and staff who have ties to the program identified through cursory conversations with the program directors (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The purposive sampling technique allowed me to specifically target the individuals with the closest connections to the scholars program (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). I relied on a shared positionality as someone who works with a scholars program to gain access to this population of individuals and to build rapport with them, and contacts were made possible through referrals from the program directors themselves. Complete copies of the interview

protocols for both of these groups are located in Appendices B and C. Before I elaborate on my interview protocols, I have included Table 4 in order to provide a complete blinded list of interview participants. Please note that there was not a perfect match between interview participants at the two cases due to the differing structures of the programs.

Table 4		
<i>Interview participants</i>		
Participant Role	Academy University	Oscar University
Current Program Director	1	1
Previous Program Director	1	2
Program Assistant Director	1	N/A
University President	0	1
Student Affairs Staff & Administrators	2	0
Enrollment Services Staff & Administrators (i.e. admission, financial aid)	3	6
Academic Affairs Staff & Administrators	2	0
Faculty	0	1

As outlined in Table 4, I was fortunate enough to speak with the current directors of both programs and at least one previous program director. Having similar access to program directors both current and past was highly beneficial as I sought to understand the stories, operations, and goals of scholars programs. Most of the discrepancies between types of interview participants at the two cases can be explained by the different structures of each program, which will be outlined in Chapter 4. However, on a surface level, it is important to note that the Newman Scholars Program is housed in the Division of Student Affairs at Academy University, thus the student affairs interview participation. The Presidential Scholars Program at Oscar University is housed in the Office of the President, who takes a very active role in interacting with the scholars, thus his involvement in my interviews. At Academy University, the Office of Admission takes on a more advisory role in the selection of scholars, while the Oscar University Admission Office manages the selection process in consultation with the program director. These

structural differences explain why it was helpful for me to speak with a greater number of enrollment services staff and administrators at Oscar University. The differences in academic affairs staff and faculty involvement can be described by broader institutional structures and sheer participant availability.

Now that I have identified the interview participants, I will describe the two interview protocols. As seen in Appendix B, the interview protocol for program directors, I asked these individuals about the story of the scholars program, how the program began, and how it operates on a daily basis now. These questions and others helped inform the first research question about why scholars programs are created and the second research question about how scholars programs operate. Additionally, I asked program directors about strategic partnerships, changes in the program over time, and how they view the program's role within the larger institution. These questions helped to address the second research question about how scholars programs operate and the third research about the interplay between scholars programs and institutional goals.

In the interviews with other university staff members (see Appendix C for the complete interview protocol), I focused on questions more related to the day-to-day operations of the programs and questions related specific ways in which those participants interface with scholars programs (i.e. asking admission office staff about selection process details). I identified these other university staff members based on program director responses about strategic partnerships and frequent university contacts, therefore relying on the continued use of purposive sampling (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016) and what I was able to learn about reporting structures of the programs based on a cursory review of university websites. I spoke to individuals in faculty roles, admission offices, financial aid offices, and administrative offices, as appropriate. While

some of the questions were tailored to specific offices, such as asking the admission office about recruitment and selection, I also gained information more broadly about how each of these “external” individuals views the scholars program and its role within the broader university. Most of the questions I asked other staff members informed the second research question about how scholars programs operate and the third research question about how scholars programs help to meet institutional goals. Additionally, some long-time admission and enrollment services staff also had insight into why scholars programs were created which was an unexpected benefit of talking with these individuals.

In addition to alignment with the three research questions, the interview questions I asked program directors and other university staff also aligned with the six dimensions of scholars programs I defined. Questions about what faculty, staff, and administrators hope students will get out of membership in the scholars program informed my understanding of outcomes associated with the program. Questions asked of the program directors and admission offices about how new scholars are selected helped deepen my understanding of program cohort size and structure. Questions about connections between the program and the university’s strategic plan illustrated program mission and goals at the broader level. Questions asked of the program directors about events and experiences for scholars provided more detail about the programmatic experiences offered to each group of scholars. Questions about reporting structures, fundraising initiatives, and strategic partnerships across campus explained more about the levels of resources allocated to the scholars program. Lastly, questions about the totality of scholarship benefits allowed for increased understanding of the details of the scholarship funds offered to each group of students.

Table 5 summarizes how the interview questions connect with each of the six scholars program dimensions, all of which tie back to the three research questions about why scholars

programs are created, how they operate, and how they interact with broader institutional goals.

The alignment between the interview questions, program dimensions, and research questions was as anticipated based on my own professional expertise and practitioner knowledge of scholars programs. Using a semi-structured interview technique allowed me to probe further when the interview participants responded to the questions located on the interview protocols in Appendix B and Appendix C (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

Table 5 <i>Pieces of data used to explore scholars program dimensions</i>		
Dimension	Documents to Collect	Interview Questions to Ask
Outcomes associated with program	Strategic plans for institutions; student and alumni profiles; requirements for students in scholars programs	Questions about what faculty, staff, and administrators hope students will get out of membership in the scholars program
Cohort structure/size	Student profiles on program websites; recruitment and selection materials	Questions to admission office and program director about how scholars are selected
Program mission and goals	Program websites	Questions about tie-ins to institution's strategic plan, mostly asked of program directors and upper-level administrators
Programmatic experiences for students	Program websites, student highlights published on program website	Questions about how program calendar is crafted and the purposes behind various activities or projects
Resources associated with program	Program staff lists on websites; information about student funding on program websites	Questions about fundraising, reporting structures, strategic partnerships across campus
Scholarship funds offered to students	Published information on program websites; student recruitment materials	Questions about totality of scholarship benefits, whether those involve tuition, housing, study abroad, etc.

Overall, the findings from both interviews and document analysis informed each other and served to substantiate my findings on each of the six dimensions of scholars programs studied. In Table 3 and Table 5, I summarize which relevant pieces of data helped me learn more about the scholars program dimensions in question. Each of these pieces of data, and each of the dimensions, helped me answer the three research questions: why do scholars programs exist, how do they operate, and what role do they play in meeting broader institutional goals? With

robust data collected in each of these areas, I moved forward to analyze the information I collected.

Data Analysis

Although this was an exploratory study, I have some experiential knowledge of scholars programs that allowed me to define the programs and the dimensions I studied. With that in mind, I set a few a priori codes before beginning data analysis. Each of these predetermined codes (Miles et al., 2019) was tied to the six dimensions I identified for the study: outcomes associated with program, cohort structure and size, program mission and goals, programmatic experiences for students, resources associated with program, and scholarship funds available to students. These a priori codes are listed below in Table 6 with their corresponding dimension.

Table 6 <i>A priori codes and links to program dimensions</i>	
Dimension	A Priori Codes Used
Outcomes associated with program	GPA, graduation, retention, student success
Cohort structure/size	Cohort, admission, selection, interviews, offers, yield
Program mission and goals	Mission, goals, strategic plan, vision
Programmatic experiences for students	Courses, cocurricular programs, professional development, service
Resources associated with program	Faculty, staff, advisor, alumni, director
Scholarship funds offered to students	Tuition scholarship, study abroad, travel, housing scholarship

However, I also allowed more inductive, emergent codes to arise as I collected and analyzed the data (Miles et al., 2019) accommodate the exploratory nature of the study. I utilized these inductive codes in the second round of coding, where the codes were refined as additional data was collected. I was able to add both subcodes and new higher-level codes to enrich the data collected as needed by engaging in this second round of coding (Miles et al., 2019). For example, I had already decided to use the a priori code “cocurricular programs” based on my own knowledge of scholars programs but did not anticipate how important retreats would be as an example of a programmatic experience for students. Therefore, I added “retreat” as one of the

inductive codes. A full list of inductive codes can be found in Table 7. This coding process was quite iterative, as I started with codes I knew while fully acknowledging that new codes would emerge during the study. Despite this, I needed to make sure all documents had the same opportunity to be labeled with the same codes.

Table 7

Inductive codes and links to program dimensions

Dimension	Inductive Codes Used
Outcomes associated with program	Campus connections, community, student identity, student leadership
Cohort structure/size	Recruitment, requirements
Program mission and goals	Change, concerns, culture
Programmatic experiences for students	Student leadership, retreat, organic interactions
Resources associated with program	Funding, prestige, fundraising, administration
Scholarship funds offered to students	Funding, fundraising

I relied on descriptive codes in my first and second round coding processes where I utilized a priori and inductive codes, respectively. The descriptive codes helped label the data in a clear way that tied to the dimensions of interest, whether those codes were set in an a priori manner or emerged over time in an inductive manner (Miles et al., 2019). As I moved beyond codes and sought to create categories, I looked for patterns, relationships, and points of comparison between all of the codes and the data they labeled. This type of process helped to condense and simplify the codes into a smaller number of categories, and in a multi-case design, this type of pattern creation helped prepare data for analysis across cases by parsing out common ideas (Miles et al., 2019). This process allowed me to generate three themes of importance related to scholars programs beyond the initial six program dimensions. Those themes will be introduced and discussed in Chapter 4.

Trustworthiness of Data

As I analyzed my data, it was important to establish trustworthiness both from the internal and external perspectives. Through the design of my study, I have established four

methods of establishing internal data trustworthiness: data triangulation, member checking, elimination of alternative explanations, and thick, rich description (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 2009). First, triangulation was achieved by comparing results across multiple interviews and between interviews and documents from both of the cases (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For example, I was able to compare the selection process timelines outlined on program websites with the data provided on selection processes from interviews. Similarly, I was able to compare the program directors' discussions of selecting scholars with the admission offices' discussions of selecting scholars. Second, through member checks, I was able to take data back to the interview participants to be sure I accurately captured what they said during our conversations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In totality, I engaged in member checking with five of my participants by sharing my high-level findings from their particular institution with them during a 30-minute Zoom call. I was able to clarify details and confirm the accuracy of the findings from their perspectives.

Third, I was able to eliminate any alternative explanations of why scholars programs are created, how they operate, or the role they play in helping institutions meet their broader goals. To do this, I first considered alternative explanations of why scholars programs might be created and the purposes they might serve, as evidenced by the three potential drivers of scholars programs I discuss in Chapter 2. As I analyzed findings from both interviews and documents, I was able to eliminate plausible alternative explanations since none of the data I collected was contradictory (Miles et al., 2019). By asking questions about donors and using codes like fundraising, I actively sought out information that might support a donor-driven approach to scholars program creation. However, donor influence did not emerge in the manner originally supported by the literature in Chapter 2. I was able to rule out donors as a driver of scholars programs in the

manner that I initially conceptualized. This is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5. Relatedly, though not a means of establishing trustworthiness, I was able to reach data saturation by the end of my interviews and document collection. This saturation of data was consistent across documents and interviews of the two cases. Lastly, since I am focused on telling the story of scholars programs, I relied on thick, rich description to make the readers of my study feel as though they could have experienced the interviews alongside me (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Interviews allow for strong narrative ability, and the case study design permitted me to supplement the thick, rich description available from those conversations with even more information from the analysis of documents. Each of these four measures of internal trustworthiness will ensure that I have a robust, reliable, and meaningful study.

Furthermore, I have been able to establish transferability with my data, therefore lending a great deal of external trustworthiness to my study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Ultimately, I allowed for transferability in the study by selecting typical cases and relying on dimensions of scholars programs that I viewed to be typical. Furthermore, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, I rely on scholars programs as an example of a targeted student recruitment program. Through the course of this study, I was able to validate that the six dimensions I established are critical to understanding scholars programs. Additionally, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, I was able to discover three themes related to scholars programs that are of equal importance to comprehending scholars programs. This six-dimension, three-theme model for understanding can be applied to other scholars programs, and other types of targeted student programs, as well. As an example, these program dimensions and themes could also be utilized in a study of programs used to recruit first generation college students to institutions in a targeted manner. Ultimately, the model helped me to answer my three research questions: (a) why scholars programs are

created, (b) how scholars programs operate, and (c) how scholars programs help meet broader institutional goals. The ability to transfer this model to other types of programs gives my study the external trustworthiness it needs and also provides a great deal of opportunity for future research. Even in considering these elements of data trustworthiness, though, it is important to note that no study is without its limitations.

Limitations

Despite the strengths of utilizing a case study approach to study scholars programs, there are some limitations to my study. First, and perhaps most obviously, COVID-19 prohibited me from visiting either of my sites in person. I had to rely on Zoom for interviews, which did allow me to have easier access to some individuals who were retired, for example, but the inability to visit either site in person was less than ideal.

Theoretically, using institutions with so many similarities could be limiting. Since both of my cases are private institutions with rather selective admission statistics and scholars programs created around the time, one might suppose that conclusions drawn may only be transferable to similar institutions. As one example, the findings in this study may not be as widely transferable to public institutions, less selective institutions, etc. In particular, public institutions may have different goals than private institutions, meaning scholars programs could interact with institutional goals in a different manner. Additionally, different selectivity levels may mean that scholars programs have different purposes at various institutions. It might not be feasible to compare a new scholars program at a public institution to a well-established scholars program at a private institution. However, the decision to use similar institutions is supported by Yin's statement that multi-case studies should rely on cases that are more similar with the ultimate goal

of replicability and transferability rather than a traditional sampling logic that would allow for generalizability (2003).

Also from the theoretical perspective, I established the six program dimensions utilized in this study before I collected or analyzed data. While these were grounded in my own professional expertise, I do not know what would have happened if I had not established these dimensions at the onset of the study. While I believe I would have come to see those dimensions emerge based on the data I ultimately collected, and having the dimensions ahead of time allowed me to better organize my thoughts and my data, these dimensions may have colored my own thought processes from the beginning. Again, I am not concerned about any type of bias, but I wanted to acknowledge how creating dimensions prior to the study impacted my own thinking.

Additionally, since I analyzed documents, survivor bias undoubtedly came into play to some degree. Someone had to decide which documents were worth saving, which can lead to a bias in the availability of historical documents. Though some of this is mitigated by digital documents that were scanned and stored en masse, like some of the documents I retrieved from university archives, this limitation presents some risks. Perhaps old documents were destroyed or thrown away before they could be adequately preserved or digitized. By speaking to individuals as well as relying on documents I was able to mitigate this risk.

With the interviews themselves, I faced a potential limitation with there being a specific person with whom I need to speak to collect data: the program director. Fortunately, this potential limitation did not come to fruition during this study. I was able to rely on my own role as a program director and our shared professional experiences to alleviate some degree of this particular risk, but I also relied on my own personal network in selecting my cases and

contacting participants, as discussed earlier in this chapter. While the five limitations discussed here represent limitations from a design perspective, a few additional limitations of the study will be discussed in conjunction with my findings in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

By studying two scholars programs at relatively similar institutions, I sought to learn why scholars programs are created, how they operate, and how they serve to help meet broader institutional goals. Selecting the Newman Scholars Program at Academy University and the Presidential Scholars Program at Oscar University through a purposive sampling technique (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016) kept me from getting bogged down in vast institutional differences while allowing me to hone in on the intersections between scholars programs and broader institutional goals. Document analysis and interviews produced information on the institutions, scholars programs, and the interplay between the two.

As I analyzed the data, I used a combination of a priori codes to classify data according to my six dimensions of interest and more emergent, inductive codes to allow for themes that may come about on their own during this exploratory study (Miles et al., 2019). To confirm the validity of this data, I relied on data triangulation, member checks, elimination of alternative explanations, and thick, rich description (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 2009) from the internal perspective and transferability from the external perspective (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Despite the limitations of a small sample size and potential bias and access issues, this study serves to fill a sizeable gap and apply heavily studied organizational decision-making theories to the higher education setting in a new way. Now that I have outlined the study design and methods of data collection and analysis, I have a robust set of findings that answers this study's three research questions.

Findings

Introduction

This comparative case study analysis, which utilized interviews and documents, set out to answer three research questions: (a) Why are scholars programs created?; (b) How do scholars programs operate?; and (c) what role do scholars programs play in helping to meet broader institutional goals? The findings show, unsurprisingly, that the answers to these three questions are highly interrelated, and therefore the findings related to each of the six scholars program dimensions and three emergent themes did blur, to some degree. For this reason, the findings are organized around my research questions, with the findings related to the appropriate themes and dimensions embedded in each. First, I discuss findings related to program history, which serves to answer the first research question about why scholars programs are created. Second, I discussing findings related to the six program dimensions and the program structure theme, which elucidate how scholars programs operate. Third, the results related to the targeted student recruitment theme answer the third research question, which seeks to understand how scholars programs help to meet broader institutional goals. Before sharing those findings, though, I provide a brief overview of the context surrounding the program dimensions and themes.

Scholars Program Dimensions in Findings

Prior to conducting my research, I identified six a priori dimensions of scholars programs that I believed would be critical to answering my three research questions. The themes are program mission and goals, cohort structure and size, resources associated with program, scholarship funds available to students, programmatic experiences, and outcomes associated with program. The findings from each of these dimensions are discussed in association with my research questions below, including COVID-19 implications for those dimensions that were

impacted by the pandemic, such as programmatic experiences for students. The six dimensions mostly serve to answer the question of how scholars programs operate, as it is important to have a foundation for understanding this second research question to be able to better understand the first and third questions.

Emergent Themes in Findings

In addition to providing concrete evidence of the importance of each of the six previously identified program dimensions, three main themes emerged as this study progressed. I set a priori codes and established six program dimensions prior to beginning data collection. However, as I conducted interviews and analyzed documents, it became clear that there are other important themes related to scholars programs that could help answer my three research questions. Three main themes became clear during this time: program history, program structure, and targeted student recruitment.

Integration of Dimensions, Themes, and Cases

The three themes span the boundaries of the six program dimensions and are truly better suited to answering this study's research questions, especially the first (Why scholars programs are created?) and third (What role scholars programs play in helping to meet broader institutional goals?). Since the findings related to the six programs dimensions do not, on their own, answer these three questions in their entirety, the emergence of three additional themes proves quite helpful by providing a broader context to understand scholars programs. Ultimately, the six program dimensions identified in this study provide the most insight into the second research question, which asks how scholars programs operate. Additionally, case selection is important in this regard, as studying two typical programs as cases allowed for the study of emergent themes more broadly than would considering a single case study of a rare or unusual scholars program

(Yin, 2003). Program history, program structure, and targeted student recruitment provided a great deal more insight into scholars programs. Each of the three themes is further discussed in conjunction with the appropriate research question below.

As a reminder, these six program dimensions and three themes are discussed in the context of the two cases selected for this study: Academy University and Oscar University. Academy University is home to the Newman Scholars Program and Oscar University is home to the Presidential Scholars Program. Both cases were selected because they represent fairly typical cases of scholars programs, which was appropriate given that my framework was developed based on typical program dimensions. Basically, since the six program dimensions were developed based on my own professional expertise and more practitioner-focused best practices research, they were more likely to be meaningful for typical scholars programs as opposed to rare or unusual scholars programs. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this means that the program dimensions and themes discussed below can also be applied to studies of other scholars programs, and even targeted student recruitment programs. Additionally, the institutions where the programs are housed align with two of my proposed drivers of scholars programs: institutional striving (past or present) and the pursuit and maintenance of prestige. The cases will be compared where appropriate, but the biggest differences between cases emerged in relation to their history and structure. Findings related to the six program dimensions and the theme of targeted student recruitment were much more similar between these two typical cases. Overall, the robust findings related to each dimension and theme serve to answer each of my research questions as discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Why are Scholars Programs Created?

The first research question addressed by this study seeks to understand why scholars programs are created. While none of the six dimensions of scholars programs were able to answer this research question on their own, the program history theme that emerged during the course of the research provides a great deal of insight into the creation of scholars programs. As the findings below illustrate, scholars programs are founded to recruit high-achieving students.

Program History

During the course of this research, it was plain to see that the history of each scholars program continues to impact its mission, goals, and operations. Furthermore, history as a theme contributed to this study's first research question regarding why scholars programs are created. This section first discusses the founding stories of both scholars programs which were informed through historical documents and interviews with program directors both past and current. Second, it discusses the implications of program history, as ties to the founding stories of scholars programs came through very clearly in many of my interviews, and even in some of the website documents that were analyzed. While the history of each program is different, the importance that history plays in their current operations seems to be quite similar.

Founding Stories. Before moving further into discussion of findings related to history, it is important to understand how each of the scholars programs in this study began. The Newman Scholars Program was named for Dr. Paul Newman³, a previous president of Academy University and noted philanthropist in the community. Friends of Dr. Newman's started making donations to create a scholars program in his name after his retirement from the presidency. Some of Dr. Newman's most noteworthy qualities, humility, service, and a sense of quiet leadership, still permeate the selection process for new scholars today, as evidenced by the materials the program staff share with their application reviewers discussed earlier in my

³ Dr. Paul Newman is a pseudonym.

findings. In fact, in the earliest days of the program, students were not able to nominate themselves for the Newman Scholars Program; they had to receive a nomination from someone else before they were able to apply. The first program director recalled this decision as being quite intentional. According to her, the program's creators said that Dr. Newman would have never nominated himself for a prestigious award, so the non-self-nominating nature was a direct impact of the program namesake. As time has gone on, however, the nomination process has been removed to increase program access. Two years ago, Dr. Newman spoke with the current program director and blessed this change. Program staff all remarked that until his recent passing, Dr. Newman continued to interact with the scholars who had been selected in his image.

Alternatively, the Presidential Scholars Program is not named for any specific person. It began as a pure scholarship in the late 1960s, when Oscar University was seeking to increase its national presence. A scholarship brochure for Oscar University first mentions the Presidential Scholarship in its 1968 printing. This scholarship transitioned to a scholars program with community-building opportunities in the mid-2000s, when, according to a previous program director, Oscar University was at the beginning of a surge in its national reputation and prestige levels. Whether a scholarship or a scholars program, the documents and interviews in this study show that the Presidential Scholars have always been high-achieving students, though the definition of high-achieving has shifted over time. In the earliest years, the Presidential Scholarship published a brochure with printed academic requirements in the form of GPA and test score requirements; any student who met those criteria would receive a Presidential Scholarship. According to one former program director, the programmatic elements were added to the student experience and, starting in 2012, finalists were identified and required to interview on campus for further consideration. The current program director, one previous program

director, and multiple admission staff members at Oscar University all mentioned the addition of this interview element, as they found to be a best practice for scholars programs after some best practices research of other programs at peer and aspirant institutions. Additionally, with that interview day element in place, the program director noted that Oscar University has shifted its focus to selecting students who excel in more well-rounded ways. The academic core remains, but Presidential Scholars are also expected to act as leaders, to serve the community, and to give back to the institution through their time and efforts.

Implications of History. Despite the different founding stories and changes over time, both programs and their staff recognize that at least part of the mission of their programs has always been to increase prestige and reputation for the universities. This is quite apparent at Oscar University, where both interviews and documents in this study support the statement that the selection criteria for the Presidential Scholars Program has always been about student quality. The Presidential Scholars Program director spoke to the types of students the program looks to attract by saying,

Something that the President and other folks really bring in too is, "Let's make this a program that can compete with any admission offers." So, we don't want to just get the students who would probably come to OU anyway and reward them with a nice scholarship, we want to compete with the students who are getting offers at really prestigious institutions. We want them to look at their offer from Stanford and their Presidential Scholars Program offer and have to have a really difficult time making a decision on where they're going to go.

As a selective, but not highly selective institution, it seems that Oscar University uses the Presidential Scholars Program to recruit high-caliber students. Even a 1968 scholarship brochure

for Oscar University obtained from the university archivist stated that the Presidential Scholarship was given to the most academically high-achieving students. Similarly, at Academy University, where the program was started to honor Dr. Newman, an element of prestige-boosting was added in almost from the start. As the director of the Newman Scholars Program reflects,

I think that in all honesty, I suspect there was about kicking our numbers up there. I think that was the origin of it. And I think that everybody felt that that was what was good for the school. And Academy University went from like 30th in the country to maybe 14th or something like that over the years. So, I think that the idea behind it was to give us a sense of lift and really draw great students and to build the academic environment and service environment.

Thus, evidence suggests that a desire to recruit high-achieving students and compete with prestigious institutions for those students is why both of these scholars programs were created. Again, it is important to realize that these two cases were selected because they are typical representations of scholars programs. The reasons that they were founded will not be true of all scholars programs, but I am able to draw the conclusion that typical scholars programs are created with a goal of recruiting high-achieving students.

As those exceptional students have joined their university communities, many of the programmatic experiences for students in scholars programs are steeped in history and tradition of their own. Whether that is the off-campus retreat for the Newman Scholars or an etiquette dinner for the Presidential Scholars, both program directors stated that many of these experiences are based on things that have been happening throughout the entirety of the programs' existences. Program directors have certainly innovated and added programming over time, but

during their interviews, both remarked that many core elements remain the same over time. The Newman Scholars Program staff even noted that the retreat was something they hope will build affinity among alumni as they seek to expand alumni programming in the future.

Similarly, the type of tuition scholarship funding awarded to students in these scholars programs has not changed much over time based on the evidence available to me during the course of this study. The Presidential Scholars received full tuition scholarships in 1968 according to the Oscar University scholarship brochure, and they receive full tuition scholarship now as evidenced in the scholarship offer letter shared with me. However, Oscar University recently added the potential for a housing scholarship for the top candidates. The current and past program directors noted that the addition of a housing award came about in an effort to provide further incentive for those top candidates to attend Oscar University, again a nod to the program's original purpose. The Newman Scholars Program director reported that the program has always awarded full tuition and half tuition scholarships; now the staff are considering the mix between those two alternatives more thoughtfully, as was discussed in program dimensions section of this chapter.

History, tradition, and how we have always done things impact so many facets of higher education institutions, and scholars programs are no exception. As history impacts all six of the scholars program dimensions utilized in this study, this particular theme arose frequently in both interviews and program documents and served to help me understand my first research question of why scholars programs are created. The evidence suggests that scholars programs are created to recruit high-achieving students. History, too, connects to the other two themes that will be discussed in this section, as the history of both programs in this study has served to influence the way they are structured now and the targeted recruitment tactics upon which they rely. Just as it

is important to understand why scholars programs are created to understand what they do and how they help meet institutional goals, it is important to understand the origins of the programs before understanding the other findings that follow.

Concluding Thoughts on Program Creation

According to the data in this study, scholars programs are created because institutions want an additional tactic to recruit high-achieving students. In the case of the Presidential Scholars Program, a scholarship alone helped recruit these students from the late 1960s to the early 2000s, but programmatic elements were added in the early 2000s to provide a true experience for Presidential Scholars beyond the tuition scholarship they each received. Both previous program directors interviewed in this study noted that the introduction of a stronger element of community allowed students to feel more connected to the program and the institution. Furthermore, one previous director of the Presidential Scholars Program noted that doing so aligned with scholars-program best practices that he identified in his own practitioner-focused research. In the case of the Newman Scholars Program, the program was created with the dual purpose of bringing in those desirable students while also honoring a former Academy University leader. The naming piece was important to honoring Dr. Newman, but the mission of drawing top-notch students to the institution, based on my interview data, really gets at the core purpose of the program's creation. Understanding program history helps to answer my first research question.

How do Scholars Programs Operate?

After more fully understanding the programs' histories and reasons for creation, we can better understand how scholars programs operate. All six program dimensions and the program structure theme contribute to the answer to this question. First, I demonstrate the findings related

to each of the six program dimensions: program mission and goals, cohort structure and size, resources associated with program, scholarship funds for students, programmatic experiences for students, and outcomes associated with program. Second, I detail the findings related to the program structure theme that emerged during the course of the research. These seven sets of findings together serve to show that scholars programs operate by providing students with special community-building opportunities and a large volume of diverse resources.

Program Mission and Goals

Results from both cases indicate that scholars programs are strongly driven by mission, both at their own program level and at the broader institution level. Furthermore, the interviews and document analysis reveal that (a) the programs seek to recruit high-achieving students, (b) connect to strategic plans, and (c) have goals of expanded student diversity and greater alumni engagement. These findings were of equal importance in the instance of both cases and serve to structure by discussion of this dimension.

Student Recruitment Mission & Strategic Plan Connection. While the core mission of both scholars programs in this study is to recruit exceptional students, the nuance of what that means has changed over time. For both programs, this change has been connected to the increasing academic quality at the institutions. Program directors have been asked to up the ante in their selection processes as the institutions themselves have become more selective. Again, though, it is important that there is a connection back to the institution's mission in that process. Julie, one staff member from the office of undergraduate admission at Oscar University said,

I think the inclusive excellence portion [of the strategic plan] is going to be something that's interwoven into the Presidential Scholars Program, and as students are graduating

from Oscar University, if they're truly upholding the mission and vision of OU, they should become the best versions of themselves while here.

She noted that it is critical that the students who are selected to be Presidential Scholars are the students who are “going to invest in OU and help carry us to the next phase” of the institution’s journey. There is a visionary quality related to statements like this; staff who work both directly (i.e. program directors) and indirectly (i.e. admission office staff) see scholars programs as something that can help bring an institution’s vision into action. Based on these findings, for the Presidential Scholars Program in particular, the ties to the institution’s strategic plan were clear and explicit.

While the mission driving both programs in this study—to recruit exceptional students—was similar, the reason this mission came about does differ between the two. For the Newman Scholars Program at Academy University, the mission was most closely connected to the program’s namesake, who was known across the institution and community as being humble and kind with the true heart of a servant leader. This program, housed in the Division of Student Affairs, was loosely connected to the divisional strategic plan, but the tight connection to Dr. Newman’s own personal mission was evident in a strong way. Newman Scholars are expected to uphold a similar mentality. The program director shared an anecdote that clearly illustrates the ethos Newman Scholars are expected to project. He says that right from the start of his tenure as program director, the older students would tell new students not to let anyone on campus know they were Newman Scholars,

That’s the first thing they said, and I got wind of this, and I said, “no, I disagree with that. As the new leader I disagree with that. We need to let people know what we’re doing, because we’re not going to get any funding for our program if people don’t know that

we're doing anything." And I said, "I want to get t-shirts and sweatshirts for everyone. So, they can see that you're Newman Scholars." The upperclassmen were shocked at this. They were absolutely taken aback by this and said to me, "this isn't who we are." And I took this to the first years privately and said, "this is where I want to go, and this is what the upperclassmen feel, and I want to honor this. But, I also want to be heard with regard to this.

Seeming to have reached an impasse, the program director recalls one of the first-year students raising their hand and asking,

What about socks? If we had socks that said Newman Scholars on them and we wore shorts, then that would be a choice to show it off. And if we wear long pants no one would ever have to see it.

To this day, every new Newman Scholar gets a pair of socks when they join the program, and this small token provides a tangible artifact representative of program culture and the mission intended for the program by its namesake.

Explicit or implicit, the mission of each program includes some sort of expectation for student members: giving back, staying humble, and recognizing the gift that they have been given. As Leonardo, another admission office staff member at Oscar University said,

We don't want Presidential Scholars who are just going to be really smart and not do anything, but more so students who are doing to find ways to impact their majors, community service projects, to impact student government, to really be leaders on campus in ways that are meaningful to them.

Similarly, John, a faculty member in the University Honors College who teaches many Presidential Scholars noted he always tells new scholars,

Congratulations, you're here, but you have a higher level of accountability and responsibility now. Because at the end of four years, you want to say, "I did everything humanly possible to earn what was given to me at the front of my career."

This suggests that students in scholars programs are truly expected to embody the mission and goals of their programs and fulfill the expectation that they will be high-achieving students on campus the same way they were in high school.

Goals. Looking ahead, individuals associated with both programs noted goals of increasing student diversity, which is also a stated goal of each of the strategic plans analyzed in this study: the institutional strategic plan at Oscar University and the Division of Student Affairs strategic plan at Academy University. The Newman Scholars Program calls out this goal explicitly in the materials program staff share with the faculty and staff who participate in the selection of new scholars. Materials given to those reviewers state,

Another note on diversity: The vast majority of applicants for the Newman Scholars are white, middle to upper income students. Please keep an eye out for minorities, and first-generation college students as well. We will have many applicants who have had advantages – give a serious and very careful read to the disadvantaged.

At Oscar University, Tom, the Dean of Admission discussed how minoritized students are brought into initial consideration for the Presidential Scholarship,

We will establish some minimum GPA that we're looking for, and it's not even across the board, because there are protected classes that we want to make sure get in the mix. We really value diversity at OU, and diversity of thought, diversity of life experience, diversity of worldview, some of that stuff can't be captured in a GPA. And so we don't want to miss out on potentially incredible students who will contribute mightily to the

experience of all Presidential Scholars. So, we usually will have a GPA that is slightly lower for those protected students, namely students of color... technically sure, it's a lower GPA, but we're not going from like a 3.95 to a 3.2. We're talking about fractions of a percent.

There is some concern between/from both program directors about the best way to meet diversity goals. They explained that many traditional measures of high achieving students—whether it's GPAs, as Tom mentioned, or access to special leadership opportunities—tend to favor students from advantaged backgrounds. However, both these specific reviewer instructions at Academy University and the details of the review process at Oscar University suggest that is important to the future success of their programs and their ability to meet the goals of institutional and departmental strategic plans.

Both program directors also noted goals of increasing interaction with program alumni as they look for ways to strengthen their programs and help to achieve the vision of having strong affinity with the programs beyond graduation. As an example of this, the Newman Scholars Program is about to celebrate its 20th anniversary. The program director sees this anniversary as an idea opportunity to begin to reach his alumni engagement goal,

The move now is to get our alums together, which that's an effort that we haven't made and what we need to be doing. And so that's our goal now, is really to get the alums, keep the alums together and keep that love of Academy University going among them.

The desire to achieve this kind of goal suggests that the culture of community in each scholars program and the mission of bringing high-achieving individuals together extends beyond graduation for students in scholars programs. Program directors and program staff expect current

scholars to be contributing members of the university community while on campus, but they also hope that engagement with the program and the institution will continue after scholars graduate.

As institutional goals evolve, it will be interesting to see if the future goals of scholars programs evolve alongside them. Comparing historical documents to current websites and publication materials shows us that the missions of each program have not changed over time. Coupling this mission continuity with the goals of each program leads me to anticipate that the nuanced interpretations of those missions, for example recruiting more diverse students, will be where the change occurs. Recruiting high achieving students may indeed look different in practice or in structure over the years, but there is no reason to believe that this core purpose will change.

Cohort Structure and Size

Recruiting a cohort of students each year that helps to fulfill program and institutional missions and goals is critical to the success of scholars programs. Understanding the specifics of how a scholars program cohort is recruited and selected helps explain both my second and third research questions: how scholars programs operate, and the role they play in meeting institutional goals. The operational piece is represented by the selection processes for each case, which are discussed here, and the institutional goals piece is connected to the student qualities that are sought out in these processes. After all, directors of both programs in this study discussed that getting the “right” students in a scholars program is the best way to bring a mission into action. As examined in relation to the program mission and goals section, students in scholars programs are expected to enact the missions as they continue through their collegiate journeys. Aside from the selection processes that will be discussed here, this section also covers

other findings related to ideal student qualities and how COVID-19 has impacted many areas of this particular program dimension.

Recruitment & Selection Processes. The recruitment and selection process for each of the two programs studied differed in the level of involvement of the admission office and the criteria desired in ideal candidates, though both programs hold on-campus interviews for finalists for their programs. In both cases, the interview weekend is intended to both select scholarship recipients and to acquaint the students with their campuses in hopes that they will feel a strong connection to the university, serving as a strong yield tool for these students. Leonardo, who works in the admission office at Oscar University, discussed interview day by saying, “we do a good job of showing them who we really are, what it actually means, and what it looks like to be a Presidential Scholar,” over the course of that weekend. I briefly provide an overview of each program’s selection process to ground the discussion of my findings on cohort size and structure.

The Newman Scholars Program looks for students who, much like the program’s namesake, have demonstrated a great deal of leadership and service while maintaining an attitude of humility. Academic quality is inherent given the academic quality required for admission to Academy University, but there is no extra attention paid to a student’s academic record during scholars program review. As one of the stated pillars of the Newman Scholars Program notes, “Newman Scholars are committed, dedicated leaders with a passion for service. They actively invest in our community of scholars, hone their leadership skills and eventually assume the mantle of leadership in the larger community of Academy University and beyond.” Until 2018, a student needed to be nominated by someone else before they were able to apply for the program: a true ode to a selfless and non-self-promoting namesake. However, the nomination requirement was recently removed as it was creating barriers to access for underrepresented populations of

students. Robert, an academic affairs administrator at Academy University, remarked on the change by stating, “the feeling was that that may not always be helping the underserved students and the first gen students who may not be as savvy when applying for college.” Now, students submit their application for the Newman Scholars Program and a supporting letter of recommendation they request on their own. Finalists are invited to interview on campus in March. The program staff leads the selection process at all points, though the admission office is involved in the initial review process and setting more strategic goals for the program. The number of Newman Scholars that are selected each year is budget-dependent, and the program director remarked the division of enrollment services is heavily involved in determining the cohort size that is most feasible.

At Oscar University, however, the admission office drives the selection process and works more directly with the program director at each step in the recruitment and selection cycle. Presidential Scholars are expected to be high achieving across the entirety of their application portfolio. When asked to describe the ideal Presidential Scholar, Julie, an admission staff member said,

The students are high achieving, typically in the top couple percent in their graduating class. They've proven themselves academically. Then they also have other factors that weigh into their consideration. Things like leadership, service to their community, high levels of involvement.

Basically, the Presidential Scholars have excelled in everything. The selection process includes multiple rounds of review by admission committees, both generally and specific to the Presidential Scholars Program, to determine the top of the top of each year's pool of admitted students. The process can become quite difficult as the academic quality at Oscar University has

increased over the last several years. Julie continued her discussion of the selection process from the admission office's perspective by saying,

They're such good students. We end up just splitting hairs and I feel like a horrible person when I dissect these awesome candidates, but we do. We have to have some that rise to the top and we try to do a fair job of evaluating them.

This process, too, culminates in an on-campus interview weekend to select the final scholarship recipients, the number of which is also driven by budget capacity. Budget impacts the number of scholars selected at both institutions in this study, though it is important to note a key cohort size difference: there are approximately 55 Presidential Scholars per cohort as compared to 18 Newman Scholars per cohort. The budget implications are of a larger scale at Oscar University.

Student Selection Requirements. The ever-important interview processes allow selection committees to look for embodiment of their programs' and institutions' mission, values, and goals in each of the finalists. The interview days, in particular, give the institutions and scholars programs a chance to better ascertain which prospective students will rise to the challenge. Admission office staff and program staff in this study often stated that they were looking for students who fit the idea of "what it means" to be a Newman Scholar or a Presidential Scholar.

As one example, instructions given to faculty and staff assisting with the Newman Scholars Program, for example, specifically state, "At its very heart, Newman is about community. Will this candidate be a willing, engaging, kind community member with a passion for helping others?" While student diversity is valued, as evidenced by the programs' goals, finding students who fit this kind of community ideal is clearly important to the scholars programs. Relatedly, Al, an admission office staff member at Oscar University discussed which

information weighs most heavily when deciding which students will be selected as Presidential Scholars,

Once they get to campus for the interviews, the feedback from the panelists that consists of current Presidential Scholars, OU faculty, and OU staff, that feedback aligned with everything that we've done in the previous round of review, lets us know who's the best bet on being a difference maker here.

Al's mention of looking for difference makers connects clearly with the program mission and goals discussed previously in this chapter. Just as the interviews are intended for finalists to show institutions how they can contribute to the programs and institutions, these weekends are at least partially intended to show finalists what it means to be a member of these communities of scholars, in a way serving as a mutual matching process and a critical yield tool. Using the selection process as a recruitment tool will be discussed later in the emerging themes section of this chapter but understanding the size and structure of scholars program cohorts contributes to a foundational knowledge of scholars programs. Understanding how these cohorts come together relates to insights into how scholars programs operate and begins to relate to the interplay between scholars programs and institutional goals, two of the three research questions addressed in this study.

While the above describes the typical selection processes for both cases, COVID-19 has upended the normal admission process with the vast expansion of test optional admission and unpredictable student enrollment. There are more factors than ever contributing to a student's college decision and the long-term effects of COVID-19 on admission and recruitment processes are currently unknown. COVID-19 affected on-campus interviews for both scholars programs this spring and will affect the selection process in the upcoming year with the introduction of

temporary test optional policies at both institutions in this study, among many others. One academic administrator at Academy University commented on changes related to COVID-19 by saying,

I think this is a turning point in admissions, test optional. I mean this is really, for a lot of schools this is gigantic. I think it's gigantic for us, because it means we have to look at students differently. We have different judging criteria than we've ever had before.

Students can't visit. We're doing everything online.

These types of changes will undoubtedly impact how scholars program cohorts are crafted and selected, and the value of what scholars programs actually offer students will likely be colored by these new environmental impacts. It seems that scholars programs are aware of these current and impending changes, but that they are still searching to find the most appropriate methods to adapt their processes while staying true to the goals of selecting a new cohort of scholars in the midst of a pandemic.

Resources Associated with Program

Once a cohort of scholars is selected and enrolled, this group of students benefits from a number of different resources that are tied to scholars programs. Though the scholarship funds themselves are perhaps the most expensive and valuable resource associated with scholars programs, scholars programs also benefit from human resources, other types of financial resources, and an intangible resource, prestige, that are all associated with scholars programs. Findings related to this dimension are organized around human resources, financial resources, and prestige as a resource, and both cases presented similarly on this dimension. Understanding all types of program resources helps answer this study's second research question related to how

scholars programs operate, and considering prestige as a resource starts to answer the third question about how scholars programs contribute to broader institutional goals.

Human Resources. The program director represents the primary human resource tied to scholars programs. Interestingly enough, neither program in this study has a director whose full-time job is managing the scholars program. While both programs have been identified as typical scholars programs, it is unclear whether or not this program director division of labor is typical or not. Regardless, both directors have other duties and rely on administration, faculty and staff from other areas to support the operations of their program. Supporting faculty and staff at both institutions expressed concerns over the sustainability of this part-time director model. John, an honors faculty member at Oscar University, of the director of the Presidential Scholars Program, put it this way,

But she doesn't have a staff. It's really a staff of goodwill. She has to rely upon admissions to do their job, with Presidential Scholars, to help create the pool, and then they bring her into the process. She has to rely on the goodwill of me to stand up and speak. And I can always hear in her voice, an apology, as she's asking me to do something. That's a lot of pressure to put on one person, but it's also, you worry about the sustainability of a program when that one person leaves.

Similarly, Maggie, a student affairs administrator who works with the Newman Scholars Program noted the challenges associated with having a director who is also a full-time faculty member,

But now the expectation is that they're going to program more so that we can begin to build this longer-term view or program for Newman, that we may have to think about

how we are staffing. Because dealing with the staffing for these programs is a continually evolving challenge.

It seems that defining the role of the program director and having the resources to fully staff this role are a bit of a challenge for both cases in this study.

Another human resource, alumni of the program, presented more of a growth opportunity than a true challenge, as discussed in relation to the program mission and goals dimension. Neither program in this study has used alumni as a resource beyond their involvement with the interviews that occur during the selection process. However, both directors note that there is an opportunity in broadening the use of this resource. The assistant director of the Newman Scholars Program noted, “there hasn’t been a whole lot of focus on alums. That is changing. We are trying to think about how to be more intentional about that and how to get them engaged.” The program directors and their “staffs of goodwill” all seem to recognize the value that could be added with increased alumni involvement, including the opportunity to fundraise for additional dollars to support the programs.

Financial Resources. Currently, the Newman Scholars Program is funded primarily through the general operating budget of Academy University with supplementary funding coming from endowed donative funds. The Presidential Scholars Program is funded predominantly by the Oscar University operating budget with fewer donor-provided funds. A previous Presidential Scholars Program director recalled a very generous one-time gift that was received by the program during his tenure, but there has not been a sizeable fundraising push for the program by Oscar University. As the university President himself noted,

A lot of donors say to me, "I don't know what. You just use the money how you want it."

And I, of course, love that person, and I always say, "Well then we're going to put it in

scholarships, and we're going to start in the Presidential Scholars Program." And, well, I've never had anyone say no. But that's a good point. I don't specifically go out and say, "This week, we're going to raise a million dollars for the Presidential Scholars Program."

Based on this statement, even the donative funds that are funneled to the Presidential Scholars Program may be funneled through more generalized budgetary units.

The reliance on general operating budget funds is concerning given the budget constraints facing institutions of higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Budgets are tight throughout higher education and there are threats to human resources since salary and benefits are one of the largest budgetary elements at institutions. Fundraising efforts have slowed, and many institutions are in hiring freezes, leaving scholars programs with little opportunity for growth in either their human or financial resources. However, scholars programs seem to be optimistic about the opportunities to fundraise looking into the not-too-distant future beyond COVID-19. The director of the Newman Scholars Program spoke candidly about how the recent passing of Dr. Newman has provided a unique opportunity to fundraise for the program:

Dr. Newman's untimely demise has handed me another opportunity. And so I'm going to be after the alums for developing a new fund, which is actually in the inaugural program director's name that can give me some fungible money to actually help our students that are in need to attend conferences and internships and support them through those processes. And so I'm hoping that we can use this anniversary as an opportunity to build that fund as well as build the endowment.

Of the resources associated with scholars programs, financial resources seem to be coming under the most direct threat from COVID-19, but it also seems that program staff is already thinking creatively about the best ways to financially support their programs in the future.

Prestige. The third resource category identified in relation to scholars programs, prestige, will be discussed in greater detail in the recruiting high achieving students theme later in this chapter. For now, though, it is important to note that scholars programs build prestige both within the university and for the university. Within the university, scholars are typically recognized as high achievers among their peers, faculty, and staff. Multiple student affairs administrators at Academy University noted that Newman Scholars were well known and highly respected across campus, and that the scholars are often tapped to fill key leadership roles on campus. Outside of the university, the successes and positive reputations of students in these scholars program are often the success stories being used to promote the broader successes of the universities to prospective students and community members. Leveraging prestige as a resource allows scholars programs to help meet institutional goals of recruiting high-achieving students, and Leonardo, an admission office staff member at Oscar University noted how he sees this in action:

Then, some of [the Presidential Scholars Program] really is to try and get students at OU who we probably wouldn't get if we weren't offering this scholarship and program, students that are just so incredible that they're not going to come here if they're just getting our half scholarship, because they can go anywhere and get these kinds of top scholarships.

As he mentioned, some of this prestige, too, may be due in part to the fact that the university is making a large financial investment in each of these students, meaning that each of these types of scholars program resources are related.

Scholarship Funds Offered to Students

Perhaps the most immediately valuable resource given to students in scholars programs are scholarship funds, primarily in the form of tuition scholarships. As with the broader resource categories, the findings associated with scholarship funds were consistent between the two cases. Again, in line with the broader resource categories, understanding scholarship funds offered to students in scholars programs help to answer this study's second and third research questions: how scholars programs operate and what role they play in helping to meet broader institutional goals. The findings in this section are organized around two main categories: tuition scholarships, which comprised the bulk of the findings, and other types of funding which were equally less prevalent in both cases.

Tuition Scholarships. Both the Presidential Scholars Program and the Newman Scholars program offer students full-tuition scholarships. About ten years ago, the Presidential Scholars Program started offering a housing scholarship to its top candidates in an effort to provide extra incentive for those students to attend Oscar University. This decision came directly from the Board of Regents who frequently asked the program director why the strongest candidates selected other institutions, even after being named Presidential Scholars. The current program director remarked,

Well, because they can go to insert-state-school-here and get room board, books, computers, stipend, summer research, study abroad. So, the Board decided that they would create a number of scholarships that we called trustee scholarships that are room, board, and book stipends.

Now, the program director notes, Oscar University yields more of the most highly qualified Presidential Scholars due to the addition of this housing scholarship.

Alternatively, the Newman Scholars Program offers partial tuition scholarship to the finalists who interview but are not ultimately awarded a full scholarship. During interview weekend, the founding program director told finalists, “we’ve invited you here because we think you’re outstanding. And unless you do something untoward while you are here on the weekend, we’re going to make you an offer.” The current program director has maintained that practice but has noted a few challenges with finding the appropriate balance between partial and full tuition scholarships. The program director remarked that when he took over,

The majority of them were half tuition scholarships. And then a few of them were full tuition scholarships. And I was finding that challenging as I was thinking the market is really changing. So, I asked for more full scholarships rather than half. And admissions accommodated that, so that we had a balance of at least half and half. But in doing that, then admissions limited the number of people that I could bring in.

The Newman Scholars Program has most definitely worked to find the appropriate balance between the two levels of tuition scholarship funding. According to the program director, the amount of scholarship each student is awarded is based upon the student’s holistic situation: their levels of achievement, financial need, and likelihood of enrollment included. Applying this type of intentionality to scholarship awards, in the situation of both cases, is evidence that tuition scholarships are applied in a nuanced manner to help recruit students.

Other Types of Funding. Contrary to my expectations when setting my a priori codes, there was not much data to support the existence of funding for travel or study abroad beyond a brief mention of an international trip for the Presidential Scholars Program and a domestic service trip for the Newman Scholars Program. According to the program director, the Presidential Scholars Program subsidizes an annual international trip for the scholars in years

when travel is safe and acceptable. At Academy University, the Newman Scholars Program director and assistant director spoke of an annual spring break service trip that is funded by the program when domestic travel is possible. Again, each of these types of experiences was only discussed briefly in the context of the many interviews that comprised this study.

This lack of immediate focus on these areas, however, could have been due to the fact that no university travel is happening due to COVID-19. There is no international trip for the Presidential Scholars at Oscar University and no spring break service trip for the Newman Scholars at Academy University. Not only are those types of options simply not viable right now, but program directors and supporting staff are clearly more focused on maintaining scholarship funds for their students at this moment in time. Many college students are facing increased financial struggles. Looking ahead to next recruiting cycle, it will be interesting to see if the tuition scholarship on its own is enough to recruit students and keep them enrolled, or if students have greater unmet financial need than they would in a typical year. Directors of both programs are already thinking ahead to how the scholarship funds offered through their programs will be perceived by their next group of incoming students, and how fundraising might be necessary to bolster these types of scholarships and additional types of financial resources. Fundraising was mentioned in the previous section about program resources, but most certainly bears repeating when discussing scholarships specifically. While scholars programs offer a large number of experiences, connections, and networks to their students, the scholarship funds are likely the biggest recruiting tool based on the experiences of the participants in this study. Understanding the scholarship funds at a foundational level helps to explain both how scholars programs operate and how they are used to help institutions recruit high-achieving students in alignment with their broader goals.

Programmatic Experiences for Students

Beyond scholarship funding, the programmatic experiences made available to students in scholars programs are perceived by the interview participants in this study as the next most valuable aspect of the programs. These programmatic experiences are both selling points to prospective students and signature experiences for current scholars. Program staff repeatedly discussed how those experiences serve to build the community that is so valuable to both the Presidential Scholars Program and the Newman Scholars Program. This particular program dimension provides a great deal of information to answer the second research question about how scholars programs operate. This year, however, program staff report that few-to-none of those programmatic experiences have been able to occur due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing and group gathering guidelines have all but halted these student activities, leaving scholars programs without many of their most treasured experiences. For the purposes of this study, interview participants were asked to discuss their programmatic experiences during a normal year, but the impacts of COVID-19 certainly colored the conversations about what students do as members of these scholars programs.

Based on my interviews and documents, findings in this subsection are organized into three subcategories: retreats, other organized experiences, and organic interactions. While the key finding that programmatic experiences are important to scholars programs was consistent between the two cases, the types of experiences each program offers to its students differ across the two programs in each of the three subcategories.

Retreats. Retreats, in particular, were of critical importance to the programs and their students. The Newman Scholars Program, on one hand, has a retreat ripe with tradition. The first director of this program spoke about the decision to organize the inaugural Newman Scholars

retreat early on in the program's history. She recalls telling administrators about her initial desire to take the scholars to a camp with great meaning for the Newman family:

I wanted to take them to Camp Quapaw. I think that that place is so magical and they'll be away from everything, and they'll really get to know each other and they'll bond in a way that'll carry them through the four years. And so there were about 27 of them, I think, in the first cohort and it was magical.

Both the inaugural program director and the current program director recalled multiple examples of the impacts of this storied retreat on Newman Scholars' college experiences:

On the other hand, the Presidential Scholars Program is currently looking to expand their retreat. This year, the program director stated that they conducted a few retreat-like events virtually, though their usual one-day, on-campus retreat is newer to their program offerings and came about due to the request of a group of students. In speaking of their typical retreat, she noted,

We ask that [the scholars] participate in a retreat that we have for new Presidential Scholars at the start of each year. And that's usually held on the first couple of weekends of school. It's an on-campus retreat. So, retreat is a bit of a stretch. But that is one change that has been requested over and over: can it be a real retreat? We shall see.

Based on the fact that the Presidential Scholars themselves are making this request for a "real" retreat, it seems that even the scholars themselves are aware of the importance of a retreat as a community-building activity and of the fact that scholars programs at other institutions have these kinds of experiences embedded into their programs.

Other Organized Experiences. Beyond the retreats, scholars programs offer students connections and community in a variety of manners. The Newman Scholars Program director

discussed a required course for first-year students, and the Presidential Scholars Program director highlighted how the students benefit from a direct and meaningful connection with the university's President. As Henry, an enrollment services staff member at Oscar University, noted about the Presidential Scholars,

They do events together. They travel together. Sometimes they go to theater productions together, all kinds of things. So just the fact that you actually get to know the President and can ask him questions and pick his brain about things that are important to you is something that most... Our President is pretty open about that to all students, but obviously particularly with the Presidential Scholars.

It seems that these kinds of co-curricular programs and the individuals who participate alongside the scholars serve to create meaningful experiences for the scholars.

The Newman Scholars Program in particular valued service experiences for their scholars, and as mentioned in the programmatic resources dimension, the scholars participate in an annual service trip together. The trip was described on the Newman Scholars Program website:

All New Scholars are encouraged to participate in a community-service based spring break experience. Past groups have traveled to West Virginia and Louisiana to participate in Habitat for Humanity builds and most recently, scholars have focused their efforts on the local community, working to help economically disadvantaged persons achieve economic independence, self-sufficiency and a path out of poverty.

The program director noted that this focus on service is a direct nod to the service-focused nature of Dr. Newman, the program's namesake. While I expected to find mentions of professional development opportunities based on my own experiences as a scholars program director, these

did not appear to be the main focus of scholars program experiences for students. Vivien, a student affairs administrator at Academy University, mentioned that bringing existing professional development opportunities at the institution to Newman Scholars specifically was a helpful means of delivering professional development:

So one thing we try to provide is professional development for our students. we try to bring opportunities into our space because sometimes students will access resources in a more comfortable setting than they will just a general.

A former director of the Presidential Scholars Program mentioned his desire that all Presidential Scholars would develop intellectually, professionally, and socially during their time at Oscar University. His mention of this holistic development in conjunction with this nod to professional development speaks to the intentionality with which scholars programs experiences seem to be crafted.

Additionally, though, staff affiliated with both programs noted how those experiences often translate into a call to action to give back to their universities through leadership and service. The Presidential Scholars Program director remarked that scholars are called on to,

Strengthen the campus experience and culture. I think that comes into play where the President really sets some expectations for the students like, “We want you to be leaders in a wide variety of ways, and we have high expectations of how you'll compose yourself.” So, we do see our students serving in a wide variety of leadership roles and a lot of different ways and it's really neat to kind of see the ways that they kind of grow both inside the classroom and outside the classroom.

This statement ties back to the idea that scholars truly are expected to embody the mission of their program by leading, serving, and connecting through the opportunities afforded to them in the program.

Organic Interactions. On top of all of these experiences, though, both program directors and associated staff noted the value of scholars interacting with each other in more organic manners to truly form a network of scholars. Henry, an enrollment services administrator at Oscar University, spoke specifically of the benefit of this kind of community for the Presidential Scholars:

I think it also gives [the scholars] a chance to meet students that are like-minded, and to build a little network there right off the bat of students who are serious academically; who want to have fun, but also their studies are important to them. I think they like connecting with other students who are like-minded.

Whether those networks are built in shared study and lounge space for scholars or through community built in a residence hall, the scholars benefit from experiences they have together.

“What it is,” the Newman Scholars Program director noted in discussing the purpose of scholars programs, “is, in the greatest sense, community. And we are challenged with that right now.”

COVID-19 has truly transformed what it means to build community in scholars programs. Given that this pandemic will end eventually, the program directors remain focused on temporary adaptations while also focusing on the long-term impact they can still have on their students.

Thinking about day-to-day operations both now and in the future serves to explain how scholars programs operate, but also starts to support ideas of why scholars programs are created when considering the intentionality of the experiences scholars have in these programs.

Outcomes Associated with Program

Pandemic or otherwise, there are still some outcomes and takeaways scholars program participants are expected to obtain by virtue of their membership in such programs, whether through programmatic offerings or other scenarios. Rather than valuing quantitative student success data, like GPAs and graduation statistics, program staff in this study focused more on qualitative feelings and experiences they hoped students would have as a result of participation in a scholars program. I discuss the possible reasoning for this lack of quantitative outcome relevance in Chapter 5, but there may be selection bias tied to this outcome.

Studying the outcomes associated with scholars programs connects to this study's second research question of how scholars programs operate, but it also alludes to the first research question of why scholars programs are created. Since there are, indeed, desired outcomes associated with scholars programs, this can perhaps provide insight into why colleges and universities create them in the first place. The findings that follow are organized into two categories: academic outcomes and developmental outcomes. While each scholars program had a slightly different interpretation of what academic outcomes and developmental outcomes entailed, both of these broader types of findings were still important to both of my cases.

Academic Outcomes. One of the first academic outcomes sought out were the requirements for students to stay in good standing with each scholars program. The requirements for staying in good standing with each scholars program in this study were quite different. The Presidential Scholars Program requires students to earn a 3.00 cumulative GPA in their first year and a 3.25 cumulative GPA for all subsequent years, and this requirement is laid out clearly in the scholars program invitation letter sent to accepted students. Alternatively, the Newman Scholars Program does not have a GPA requirement. Staff at Academy University felt that the admission process itself is enough to vouch for a student's academic success, as several

participants stated in their interviews. Beyond discussions of how students stay in good standing with the programs, though, neither traditional student success, graduation, nor retention of scholars was mentioned with much prevalence. Instead, the idea of building community emerged as the most prominent desired outcomes associated with scholars programs.

Developmental Outcomes. More developmentally focused outcomes of community and support were expressed in how students interacted with each other and with program and institutional leadership. One former Presidential Scholars Program director noted that the initial goal of expanding programming for scholars was,

to try to figure out how to bring them together. We were looking at the social aspect, the educational aspect, and then we were giving them access. That was probably the most valuable thing that they got was this sense that they were directly able to address their own concerns and to be listened to.

Scholars program staff hope that their students feel valued, connect to campus, and know that they are an important part of the community. Robert, an academic affairs administrator at Academy University who works with the Newman Scholars Program, summed up this feeling by saying,

The really cool thing about all the [Newman Scholars] Program is the cohort and their peers that they're with day in and day out and the different programming that they do with their peers, who are part of that scholars program. That's the real value of the program. It's them becoming a family and a really tight knit group.

This family mentality seems becomes a part of a student's identity while they are a member of a scholars program that provides them with opportunities to grow and develop alongside a supportive community of peers.

That type of support also translated into a feeling of empowerment that program staff hoped students would experience. The current director of the Presidential Scholars Program stated,

I hope that they always see our office as a place that they can come if they need something, if they have a question, if they see something that needs to be improved or changed. That's a refrain that administration echoes over and over, "If you see something that we can make better, let me know. And I want you guys to help us with that." So, I hope that they feel empowered and supported to do those things.

The value of support, community, and empowerment for students in scholars programs is seen as highly beneficial by those who work parallel to the programs, too. "Idealistically," Robert continued in his discussion of student outcomes, "if we could have every single student a part of a special cohort, like the Newman Scholars, we would do that because there are some so many benefits for the student in that regard." These benefits seem to include students who demonstrate leadership, find success in their collegiate careers, and feel connected to their program and their institution.

Both cases in this study prioritized the developmental program outcomes over the academic ones, despite their different sets of student requirements for remaining in good standing. The value placed on community, connectivity and more personal development also helps provide some reasoning behind the creation of scholars programs. If scholars programs help students achieve these desirable outcomes, it makes sense that an institution would create such a program. Furthermore, though, analyzing program outcomes helps explain how scholars programs operate, meaning that this program dimension connects to two of my research questions, albeit not in the more academic manner initially anticipated.

Program Structure

In addition to the findings associated with the six program dimensions, the findings from the emergent program structure theme help to answer the second research question under consideration in this study. Just like the program history theme, structure cuts across program dimensions and impacts many facets of each scholars program. Structures within each institution, such as where the program is housed and who is making decisions about scholars program, also impact the programs operations. While the six program dimensions discussed previously begin to answer this study's second research question of how scholars programs operate, the program structure theme provides even more insight into this question. The following section first outlines reporting structures to provide an overview of each program's structure. Second, it discusses the implications of those structural differences as they relate to the role of admission offices and program directors.

Differences in Reporting Structures. Reporting structures, most notably, affect how scholars programs operate. The Newman Scholars Program is housed within the Division of Student Affairs at Academy University. The program director reports to an administrator in the Division of Student Affairs, Maggie, who oversees the various scholars programs at the institution. Maggie sees this structure as an asset to the scholars and what the programs are able to accomplish,

I'm all over the university. So, I have this universe of programs in the Office of Scholar Programs, and then I'm also working with students all across the campus. So, it's a very unique way to see what student union is doing or to come back and encourage the scholars and say, "Hey, is anybody applying for the student representative to the Board of Trustees? Somebody needs to do that."

Her connectedness with the broader university and other key student involvement pieces in the Division of Student Affairs seems to allow the Newman Scholars access to those connections and opportunities that will allow them to lead and serve. Given that leadership is one of the key tenets of the Newman Scholars Program stated on the program website, this makes a great deal of sense.

Interestingly enough, the Newman Scholars Program was not always housed in the Division of Student Affairs. Until about five years ago, Academy University administrators noted that it was housed in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the institution's largest college. However, the creation of an Office of Scholars Programs allowed a few different scholars programs to come together and benefit from what one Academy University administrator called a "holding company" that helped to support all of them. The current program director was a part of that transition and sees a great benefit to this type of organizational structure. In speaking of the Office of Scholars Programs, he says,

We've all come together as a department. We're now operating together as a unit. We've come from very different areas of the university, come together and now being a part of student affairs, things are run a little bit differently, but I think it's been a big benefit to come together and see what the other programs are doing, share knowledge, share resources.

For the Newman Scholars Program, this change seems to mean more resources, more space, and more opportunity.

Alternatively, the Presidential Scholars Program at Oscar University is housed within the Office of the President, making interactions with the President himself a hallmark of the

scholars' experience. One former program director noted that this type of organizational structure might be a bit more unusual. She explained,

I do think that there was something really unique about the fact that it reported directly into the President's office administratively, and that was amazing to [the students], that they were tied in so easily and that they could count on that.

Much of her knowledge of other scholars programs was that they tended to be housed in academic units. Of this, she noted,

When you house a program like this in an academic unit, it sends a different message about what that program is. I think that it's logical, but because it's an academic scholarship, it has academic roots. It's different, however, when programming happens out of the CEO's office.

Housing a scholars program in the President's office, then, seems to have bestowed a certain degree of prestige on the program and its scholars, but also allowed students access to a key resource: the President. Both programs in this study seem to have seen the benefits of a more centralized organizational location, but the current data does not point to any specific downsides of such reporting structures.

Implications of Structural Differences. While the reporting structure was the most noteworthy structural difference that shaped the two scholars programs in this study, there are two other key areas that define program operations. First, the admission offices at each institution had varying degrees of involvement in the recruitment and selection processes. At Oscar University, the program director and admission office staff both commented on how closely they work together to select Presidential Scholars. At Academy University, the program director and admission office staff stated that the admission takes on more of a strategic and

advisory role in the selection of Newman Scholars, in addition to helping with an initial pre-screen of applications. The difference in the role of the admission office in each selection process seems to shape the front end of this process: the Presidential Scholars Program process involves multiple rounds of admission committees, while the Newman Scholars Program process involves an initial pre-screen by the admission office and a more thorough review by other faculty and staff. However, both processes culminate with interview days that seem, from the documents analyzed during this study, to operate rather similarly. This suggests that the early parts of the selection processes may be shaped by the programs' organizational relationships to the admission office, while the interview day experience remains important regardless of organizational structure.

Second, the definition of the program director roles was noteworthy. The director of the Newman Scholars Program has a faculty title, and the director of the Presidential Scholars Program has a staff title. Generally speaking, faculty have teaching and research responsibilities, while staff are focused on more operational pieces of the institution. While both program directors described that they have responsibilities outside of their scholars program roles (e.g., teaching classes as a faculty member or planning donor events in the Office of the President as a staff member), their broader titles of faculty or staff likely impact how these roles are structured and perceived. As a faculty member, for example, the director of the Newman Scholars Program discussed teaching the first-year course for these scholars, but also teaching in the Journalism department in his faculty role. The director of the Presidential Scholars Program described working on other initiatives for the President's Office when she is not working with the scholars themselves. Both programs, though, seem to operate with a "staff of goodwill" in addition to their official staff, as mentioned when discussing the program resources dimension previously in

this chapter. It is possible that the structure of these program director roles impacts the types of programmatic experiences that scholars have during their undergraduate years. Whether or not that holds true more broadly, it is clear that various elements of organizational structure affect how these two scholars programs operate, allowing me to gain more insight into my second research question related to program operations. Despite the differences in structures related to the selection processes, though, both scholars programs in this study use those structures to enact perhaps one of their most important functions: recruiting exceptional students.

Concluding Thoughts on Program Operations

The data discussed here illustrates that scholars programs operate by providing scholarships and other key resources to students in the programs while also providing them with access to targeted experiences that are more exclusive than what is offered to the general student body. Direct program staff and other allies across the campuses work together to allow the scholars programs to operate as intentionally as they do. As the director of the Presidential Scholars Program discussed, she works with many offices and departments all across campus, referred to as a faculty colleague by a “staff of goodwill,” to make sure the Presidential Scholars have an exceptional campus experience. Through all of these experiences, program staff hopes the students will feel they are a part of a true community of scholars with a connection to their institution that leads students to enact the mission of the program as they move through their undergraduate careers. As the instructions given to members of the Newman Scholars Program noted, “Newman is about community.” The day-to-day operations of scholars programs are focused on community and connection and defined by program missions. Each of the six program dimensions identified prior to collecting data and the program structure theme answer this research question.

What Role do Scholars Programs Play in Helping to Meet Broader Institutional Goals?

Finally, this study seeks to understand how scholars programs can be leveraged to help institutions meet broader sets of goals. This last question is best understood after first gaining knowledge about program creation and operations and is answered by findings related to targeted student recruitment, the third and final emergent theme identified in the study. Findings connected to this final theme are detailed in the next section and show that scholars program can play a large role in helping institutions to meet the goal of recruiting high-achieving students to their campuses.

Targeted Student Recruitment

After conducting the research in this study, it has become clear that scholars programs are used for targeted student recruitment, in this case the recruitment of high-achieving students. As colleges and universities seek to recruit and enroll more high-achieving students, this theme helps to answer this study's third and final research question: what role do scholars programs play in helping to meet broader institutional goals? When it comes to the broader institutional goal of increasing academic quality, the alignment between scholars programs and institutions seems quite clear. The section below discusses four key subsections of this theme: specifics of the targeted student population, recruitment tactics, implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how institutions leverage prestige in their targeted student recruitment plans. Before moving forward, it is also important to note that the findings all aligned between the two cases in this study.

Specifics of Targeted Populations. The definition of what high-achieving students look like has changed over time at both institutions and in both programs. The program directors of the Newman Scholars Program and the Presidential Scholars Program both noted an increase in

the academic credentials of their students. As Leonardo, an admission staff member at Oscar University, noted, “Truly, every year I sit here and think, ‘no one can get cooler than this person,’ and then the next year you just get your mind blown again.” Both applicant pools have continued to broaden, too, with a more holistic definition of high achieving for the Presidential Scholars Program and the removal of the nomination process from the Newman Scholars Program, both of which were described previously in this chapter. These each represent ways in which the pools of top students being sought out have changed over time, but it seems, in comparing the scholars programs to relevant strategic plans, that the changes are keeping pace with overall institutional goals every step of the way. Recruitment literature at Oscar University notes that the Presidential Scholars are selected as top students who have been “carefully chosen from one of the most academically competitive groups of admitted students in OU’s history.” At Academy University, the Newman Scholars Program website explicitly notes,

The Newman Scholars Program honors students with a passion for helping others. We are looking for students who have demonstrated leadership in service and a strong commitment to community. Newman Scholars are also known for their academic excellence, personal integrity, and high ideals.

Published materials such as these are strong evidence of the type of students each program seeks to target.

Recruitment Tactics. The mechanics of the recruitment and selection process, too, are designed to yield scholars program finalists, whether or not they ultimately receive the full award. Faculty and staff at both institutions in this study spoke repeatedly about the value behind getting students on campus for interview day; both programs feel that establishing that

community early plays a big role in the students' college decisions. Tom, the Dean of Admission at Oscar University remarked,

When you come to campus and you spend three days here, you meet all of the faculty, and all of the staff, and all of the current Presidential Scholars, and all of your future classmates who are also interviewing, it really solidifies for the students, and their parents, what the program is about, and what OU is about.

Furthermore, the institutions have realized that these interview days result in yielding finalists who are not ultimately selected as scholars. Spending time on campus with the red carpet rolled out for them often causes these students to fall in love with the university, the Dean of Admission noted.

Similarly, Academy University organizes a jam-packed interview weekend for Newman Scholars finalists, which includes interactions with a wide variety of members of the university community. The Assistant Director of the program described this weekend by saying:

They come for the weekend. We have events with faculty. We have a community service event. We show them or introduce them to some of the resources we have on campus, some of the things that we think that they'll be involved while they're here. We have a study abroad panel. We have an event with the upperclassmen. I think pretty much most of the things that they value the most are those connections that they make with the upperclassmen while they're here, and they get a real perspective on what it's like to be an actual scholar.

The personal attention and thorough interactions experienced during these recruitment and selection processes, in a way, seems to mimic the kind of personal attention students will get once they are on campus as members of the scholars programs. Both program directors noted

that there is a distinct aim to give students in scholars programs heightened experiences as compared to their peers in the general student body. While this can be controversial since many types of students could benefit from special community experiences, it is a big recruitment tool to show prospective students that they are special. Starting the special treatment early makes a difference in the ultimate college decision for these students, according to faculty and staff. Julie, an admission staff member, spoke about the end of the college decision cycle, when students are working to finalize their decision:

If they're having that conversation with us, it's good because we're still a contender. I think sometimes it's really hard to walk away from schools that either have bigger brands or bigger names, and for a student to really soul search and select something for themselves that they feel will meet their expectations, this is often a space that they haven't been placed in before.

Connecting with the students through those personalized experiences, like interview day, before they even start their undergraduate journey seems to be viewed by institutional faculty and staff as a meaningful way to recruit these top-notch students.

However, it seems that increasing the discussion of how special these scholars are too much can sometimes backfire. One admission staff member, Al, noted that some students would rather be part of the general student population at a more prestigious school than part of a selective program within a less prestigious school. He recalled working with one particular student:

So, it was MIT or little old OU with electrical or mechanical maybe, and they were very worried about being like smartest person at the school and being viewed as this outsider that doesn't necessarily fit in with the rest of the stuff. They wanted the collegiate

experience, but once they got the top, top scholarship that also covered room and board and other things, and I explained they were one of the top 10 out of our entire applicant pool. As soon as I said that, I realized that wasn't actually helpful for them, that wasn't value adding. It was actually a detractor because then they thought, oh no, I'm going to be this isolated person that's not going to be able to identify with other people here.

Perhaps due to this fear of isolation or perhaps because current students are often the best college salespeople, scholars program staff reported that they have found surrounding these students with peers who share their levels of excellence is seen as a community building factor that benefits the students. It does seem to be a balance: make the students feel special enough that they feel valued, but do not make them feel so special that they feel they will be an outlier on the campus. Finding the appropriate balance seems critical based on the anecdotes shared by staff members, but without scholars programs like the Presidential Scholars Program and the Newman Scholars Program, some of these students may not have even considered the institution they ultimately ended up attending.

The Impact of COVID-19. Looking ahead, several additional factors will be added into this balancing act. In considering the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly all interview participants reported that student recruitment is an entirely different beast right now. Students are more price-sensitive, so the tuition funds associated with scholars programs should help, but neither of the programs in this study cover housing costs for all scholars. Oscar University, which does offer housing scholarships to some Presidential Scholars, only does so for a select few of the strongest top candidates. Furthermore, institutions are shifting to be more focused on overall enrollment numbers than they are specific student quality in this challenging time. Again, the actual effects of COVID-19 on student recruitment are unknown at this time, but both programs, and both

institutions agree that the pandemic will change how they recruit students. As Sally, an academic administrator at Academy University, noted,

We're inventing it as we go, and I think that's probably going to change the scholarships.

I don't know yet, but I do know that every single day we figure out a new way to do something in recruitment.

Especially with large campus events like interview days being against most COVID-19 safety measures, scholars programs will have to adjust a great deal to recruit these special students.

While the Presidential Scholars Program was able to hold 2020 interview in person during February, the Newman Scholars Program had to conduct 2020 interviews virtually to adhere to their previously planned March 2020 interview weekend dates. For 2021, both programs are planning to conduct interviews virtually, which the program directors fear takes away from the special personalization and visit opportunities available to students during these weekends.

Leveraging Prestige. Aside from the recruitment and selection process mechanics, the scholars programs still have their own prestigious reputations to rely on when seeking out high-achieving students. The Assistant Director of the Newman Scholars Program at Academy University spoke to how she sees this in practice:

I don't know this, but I feel like just from emails, I get questions, I get that we're known outside of Academy University. Newman Scholars, I don't know if it's just in the scholarship community, but I think a lot of the counselors know, a lot of the teachers know they want their students to be Newman Scholars and they're encouraging them to apply. I think that it's a good recruiting tool. I think we're getting a lot of students to the university just even to apply to Academy University. I think it's helping the university as a whole to recruit really outstanding students.

Just as prestige has been discussed as a resource in previous sections of this work, it seems to be the one factor that remains consistent and continues to allow institutions to enroll high-achieving students by using scholars programs as a recruitment tool.

Concluding Thoughts on Program-Institution Goal Alignment

Ultimately, this study shows that scholars programs help to meet institutional goals through targeted student recruitment practices and the intentional crafting of cohorts of scholars. Both the Presidential Scholars Program and the Newman Scholars Program staffs discussed how students who may not have attended their institutions otherwise were drawn to attend because of the funding and opportunities associated with their programs. As outlined in both the Oscar University strategic plan and the Academy University Division of Student Affairs strategic plan, these institutions desire high-achieving students who will feel connected and empowered in their campus communities. Both of the scholars programs in this study serve to meet these broader institutional goals. The importance of targeted student recruitment and how it connects scholars programs to institutions is what led me to discuss targeted student recruitment as its own theme, however, understanding cohort structure and size and the outcomes associated with scholars programs also sheds some light on how this goal alignment comes into existence.

Conclusion

The robust set of findings enumerate above helps answer all three research questions addressed by this study. First, it shows that scholars programs are created to attract high-achieving students to the institutions that house these programs. Second, the findings illustrate that scholars programs operate by providing students with exclusive, community-focused experiences and institutional access and resources beyond what would be available to a typical student. Finally, the data shows that scholars programs help to meet broader institutional goals

by assisting in targeted recruitment of high-achieving students, though these same tenets could be applied to other types of targeted student recruitment programs (i.e. programs for first generation college students).

Despite the solid foundational findings related to scholars programs, the potential impacts of COVID-19 on these programs must not be ignored. Programs have to redefine what it means to build community when gathering in large groups is not safe. What will happen when large group gatherings are safe once more? What degree of these previously normal operations will resume? Furthermore, if institutional goals shift or resources are reduced as a result of the pandemic, particularly those goals related to student recruitment and enrollment, how will scholars programs shift to help meet those goals? Or will they shift at all? While the answers to many of these questions are currently unanswered, program staff felt confident that *something* will change in how they operate and the role that they play in the institutions where they are housed. What exactly will change remains unknown. All of this being said, both the current known quantities and future unknown quantities relating to scholars programs will impact future directions for both researchers and practitioners alike.

Conclusions

Introduction

To revisit my problem of practice, the focus of this study seeks to understand one means of recruiting high-achieving students: scholars programs. Broadening the problem of practice, it would be plausible to say that I am studying targeted recruitment programs, of which scholars programs are one example. As a reminder, prior to this study, little was known about why scholars programs exist or what exactly they do from an institutional perspective. This comparative case study of two typical scholars programs has allowed me to develop a framework for understanding scholars programs. This is a framework that could also potentially be applied to other types of targeted student recruitment programs, too. For example, this could be applied to and evaluated in the context of first-generation college student programs or programs for racially minoritized students, such as bridge programs or the Rotunda Scholars Program, which seeks to provide additional support and community for first-year students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds at Southern Methodist University. Though the use of this framework can certainly be broadened in these ways, I will focus here primarily on the implications of the study and recommendations for policy, practice, and research as they relate to scholars programs.

To address the problem of practice related to the recruitment of high-achieving students, I sought to answer three research questions related to scholars programs: (a) Why are scholars programs created?; (b) How do scholars programs operate?; and (c) What role do scholars programs play in helping to meet broader institutional goals? Each of these three questions helps me understand a facet of this previously unstudied area so that I can better determine what scholars programs are intended to do within the broader context of colleges and universities.

While I hypothesized three drivers of scholars programs in previous chapters of this study (donors, resource dependency, and the pursuit of prestige), honing in on three specific research questions allows me to study scholars programs more holistically, both in and of themselves and within larger institutional structures.

In the chapter that follows, I will discuss key findings drawn from Chapter 4 and consider the implications of those findings related to my six program dimensions and the three themes identified during the course of this study. After discussing the key findings and their implications I provide recommendations for research and practice related to scholars programs. Within those recommendations, I also include suggestions for ways in which the findings can be broadened and applied to other areas, such as other targeted recruitment programs mentioned above. Since this is an exploratory study, there are many recommendations for continuing to better understand scholars programs from the perspectives of academics and practitioners alike.

Key Findings and Implications

Before delving into the analysis and implications of my key findings, I first provide a review of the program dimensions and themes. As a reminder, the six program dimensions (program mission and goals, cohort structure and size, resources associated with program, scholarship funds for students, programmatic experiences for students, and outcomes associated with program) I identified were set prior to data collection. As a reminder, these dimensions were selected based on my own professional expertise as a scholars program director and cursory benchmarking research I have conducted through that role. Each of those six dimensions was equally important to the two cases. During the course of the data analysis process, I also identified three themes that are essential to understanding scholars programs: program history, program structure, and targeted student recruitment. Through the course of the data coding

process, I saw these themes emerge as areas that did not quite fit into the six a priori dimensions but were still of great importance to understanding scholars programs. These three themes are all connected and of equal importance between the two cases, though the details of program history and program structure varied between the two.

These dimension and themes map directly onto one of the three research questions and thus allow me to answer these questions and enhance our understanding of scholars programs. It is important to note that there is some blurring of dimensions and themes across research questions. The first research question, why scholars programs are created, was primarily answered by the program history theme, which was developed based on findings connected to codes that cohered around core program identity (mission, goals, student identity, prestige), how students are selected (recruitment, interviews, admission, selection, cohort, requirements), program resources (fundraising, alumni, tuition scholarship, funding, director, housing scholarship), and what scholars do (cocurricular programs, service, courses). The second research question, how scholars programs operate, was answered by the findings across all six program dimensions as well as the program structure theme. This program structure theme was developed based on the findings related to groups of codes including who (or what) sets the tone for scholars programs (history, mission, change, vision, goals, strategic plan, culture), who makes key decisions about scholar selection (recruitment, selection, cohort) who supports scholars (advisor, staff, director, faculty, administration), the origin of several programmatic elements (campus connections, housing scholarship, tuition scholarship, courses), and funding/fundraising. Upon reflection, I recommend that program structure be incorporated as a seventh dimension into the model. I will discuss this change in greater detail when I answer the second research question of how scholars programs operate.

Finally, the third research question, how scholars programs help meet broader institutional goals, was addressed by the findings tied to the targeted student recruitment theme, which emerged based on findings related to codes that cohered around the ideas of program changes to recruitment over time (history, change, concern), guiding recruitment principles (culture, goals, change, mission, strategic plan, vision, prestige), recruitment and selection mechanics (interviews, recruitment, requirements, GPA, yield, student leadership, admission, selection), and factors influencing student decisions (housing scholarship, campus connections, alumni, study abroad, funding, tuition scholarship, community). The key takeaways and implications that are discussed below are organized around the three research questions, with the dimension and theme findings organized by the questions they serve to answer.

Why are Scholars Programs Created?

All of my data has led to the conclusion that institutions create scholars programs as a means of recruiting high-achieving students. In the case of both institutions in this study, such program creation was quite intentional, as recruiting high-achieving students can boost institutional reputation and prestige. The founding stories of both programs serve to inform why scholars programs are created, as does the organizational decision-making literature I overviewed in Chapter 2. Both of these items are discussed in relation to the first research question below.

In considering the history of each program in this study, founding stories do a great deal to explain why scholars programs are created. In addition to the ties to decision-making literature discussed above, my interview and document collection findings show that the founding stories of scholars programs still impact their operations today, specifically operations related to scholarship offerings, program culture, and programmatic offerings steeped in tradition. The

traditional events, like the retreat for the Newman Scholars Program, are evidence that scholars programs subscribe, to some degree, to the value higher education in general places on tradition.

However, not all facets of these scholars programs have remained the same over time. While both of the cases in this study have changed elements of their selection processes over time (i.e. the removal of the nomination process for the Newman Scholars Program and the broadening of criteria for the Presidential Scholars Program), even the changes can be related back to why each program was created. The Newman Scholars Program eliminated their nomination requirement to remove a barrier to entry and allow high-achieving students of all backgrounds to apply. The Presidential Scholars Program broadened their criteria to look beyond a student's stellar academic accomplishments as students who were achieving greatness outside of the classroom were desired by Oscar University.

Whether evidenced by program traditions that remain intact or changes to which students are being targeted, program history plays an important role in why scholars programs were created and in recruiting high-achieving students to their institutions today. Both changes and consistencies tie back to program history at both cases in this study. Similarly, both program changes and program consistencies are driven by the fact that scholars programs were created to recruit high-achieving students; an intentional choice at both cases in this study. In the case of my first research question, this history theme can be paired with organizational decision-making literature to help understand institutions' decisions to create scholars programs to recruit high ability students in light of the institutions' desire to accrue status and prestige.

Implications for Expectations. At the onset of this study, I identified three potential drivers of scholars program creation based on organizational decision-making literature: donors, institutional striving, and the pursuit and maintenance of prestige. Now, having collected and

analyzed data, I believe that scholars programs are created either due to institutional striving behaviors or as a tool to help pursue and maintain prestige. I address each of these, and evidence that supports my conclusions, in turn below.

Institutional Striving. By comparing the history of both cases, there is evidence that each program was created around the time an institution was undertaking striving behavior. Resource dependency (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974) can drive this behavior when high-achieving students are identified as resources that, when enrolled, can help an institution increase its status (Kilgore, 2009), as was clearly evidenced by both of my cases. Some of this institutional striving and the competition for high-achieving students noted in my problem of practice can also be explained by academic capitalism since both are examples of market-driven phenomena (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

At Academy University, for example, the founding of the Newman Scholars Program coincides with the institution's rapid rise through the national rankings in the early 2000s. During this time, as discussed in Chapter 3, Academy University saw a dramatic rise in selectivity, which again could be related to resource dependency (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974) or academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), but is evidence of institutional striving behavior. The similar timing of this status increased and the creation of the Newman Scholars Program is noteworthy, based on the literature and my case descriptions.

In considering Oscar University, the Presidential Scholarship was transitioned into the Presidential Scholars Program in the early 2000s, as well, which also aligns with a time at which the institution was starting to garner more national attention. Given that Oscar University is less selective and appears lower in national rankings than Academy University, one could argue that Oscar University is still undertaking striving behavior. Resource dependency (Pfeffer &

Salancik, 1974) could help explain the recent enrollment growth and the current capital campaign. Similarly, the literature and the findings in this study support the fact that the Presidential Scholars Program could be leveraged to help Oscar University move into a more selective and higher status classification of institution. Both case descriptions provided in Chapter 3 produce evidence of institutional striving as a scholars program driver at both institutions.

Pursuit and Maintenance of Prestige. There is also evidence that scholars programs are created as institutions aim to pursue and maintain prestige, as supported by academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). As described in the previous subsection, Oscar University is pursuing prestige now, as evidenced by their strategic plan goals related to the pursuit of excellence. Multiple admission office staff members discussed how there is an opportunity to recruit students more intentionally for the Presidential Scholars Program, perhaps to meet this institutional goal related to institutional prestige. Academy University, it seems, has already gained a prestigious reputation, but it is important to note that the Newman Scholars Program is still an important part of the institution. The scholars program cannot simply be disbanded, as the institution must now work to maintain prestige.

Institutions may find it both difficult and costly to build and maintain prestigious reputations (Kilgore, 2009), though doing so is important for continuing to recruit high-achieving students. Resource dependency theory (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2005) posits that investing in scholars programs is worthwhile if it allows institutions to recruit the high-achieving students they desire to enroll. As outlined in Chapter 4, there are many such institutional resources associated with scholars programs, which supports the idea that maintaining prestige through the use of scholars programs may be costly for institutions. There are financial costs related to

student scholarships, staff, and programming, and massive human capital costs tied to the faculty and staff who run and support scholars programs. The scholarship funds provided to students in scholars programs on their own represent the largest financial investment in scholars programs by their home institutions, as discussed by staff and administrators at both Academy University and Oscar University.

Less Prevalent Donor-Driven Creation. In considering why scholars programs are created, donor-driven programs did not exist in the two selected cases in the way I anticipated based on the literature. Even the Newman Scholars Program, named for an important individual in Academy University's history and culture, had the purpose of honoring Dr. Newman rather than being created by Dr. Newman himself. A group of friends and supporters of Dr. Newman, however, approached Academy University with the goal of doing something to honor this great leader. Ultimately, the institution and the friends of Dr. Newman were highly intertwined in the creation of the Newman Scholars Program. In addition to the desire for Academy University to honor Dr. Newman, the institution included recruiting high-achieving students (and therefore bolstering institutional status and prestige) in the original goals of the program, as discussed in Chapter 4 and earlier in this chapter. Donors did not drive the program's creation on their own, nor was the program's namesake a donor himself. At Oscar University, the Presidential Scholars Program is not named for anyone, as the President changes over time. A former program director mentioned receiving a large donation, as described in Chapter 4, but this was after the founding of the Presidential Scholars Program and was not tied to a program name change or other changes to the program itself. In these two cases, there was no evidence of garbage-can decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972) or a mismatch of donor and institutional goals. Even the named

program, the Newman Scholars Program, is an example of an intentional institutional action rather than attaching a solution to a problem that does not exist (Cohen et al., 1972).

Ultimately, both of the drivers of scholars programs present in this study speak to the value of status and prestige in higher education because enrolling high-achieving students, as scholars programs do, is an important tool to the maintenance of both of these intangible resources. Status and prestige are created by recruiting and enrolling high-achieving students. Furthermore, enrolling high-achieving students leads additional high-achieving students to enroll, creating a continuous loop of prestige and status generation (Cook & Frank, 1993; Hoxby, 2009; Kilgore, 2009). Identifying institutional striving and the pursuit and maintenance of prestige as the organizational decision-making drivers of scholars program creation aligns with the founding stories of the two programs represented in this study and provides critical insight into my problem of practice related to student recruitment.

How do Scholars Programs Operate?

Once it is understood that scholars programs are created to recruit high-achieving students, the operations of scholars programs can be considered in greater detail. At the broadest level, scholars programs operate by providing students with scholarship funding and targeted, exclusive experiences that benefit students in a variety of ways. Furthermore, there is a clear focus on community and connections when thinking about what students do during their time in scholars programs. Operational structures varied greatly between the two cases in this study. Organizational charts, director roles, and interactions with other divisions and departments on campus were different at nearly every point. All six of the program dimensions served to directly answer this research question, as did the emergent program structure theme, which I am now incorporating as a seventh program dimension in my conceptual model. Upon further reflection

on my findings from interviews and document analysis, I decided that program structure truly is a key operating factor in a scholars program, as are the other six program dimensions. Program structure does not cut across dimensions, so to speak, as do the other two themes, program history and targeted student recruitment. For this reason, program structure fits better as a dimension, which will also be elucidated by the discussion related to this dimension in the section that follows. A new conceptual model for studying scholars programs can be found in Figure 2, at the end of this section.

Program Mission and Goals Dimension. As discussed above, scholars programs seek to recruit and build community among high-achieving students, and this mission drives much of the programs' operations. Also, critical to understanding how these programs operate are two additional findings. First, these scholars programs connect their operations to strategic plans to varying degrees. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Presidential Scholars Program has very clear ties to the institutional strategic plan at Oscar University, while the Newman Scholars Program has less direct ties to the Division of Student Affairs Strategic plan at Academy University. In this way, the data shows that scholars programs may be more or less explicitly connected to the institution's core operations. The degree of connectivity is important because it illustrates how institutions, and scholars program staffs especially, are working to explicitly match their operations to broader institutional goals. A more explicit connection to a strategic plan within the institution provides tangible evidence of how the program works to support its home institution.

Second, the short-term goals for both scholars programs include increasing diversity and alumni engagement. Both cases in this study explicitly mentioned those goals, showing that looking forward, scholars programs could be used to meet institutional goals in addition to recruiting high-achieving students by leveraging goals like student diversity and alumni

engagement. While alumni engagement may seem like a less clearly defined institutional goal than increased student diversity, alumni engagement is important for two key reasons. First, engaging alumni is a tactic that institutions use in development offices to cultivate future donors, and second, the number of alumni donors is a factor that figures into national ranking systems, including the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings (U.S. News & World Report, 2021).

Cohort Structure and Size Dimension. Scholars programs utilize intensive selection processes to craft each cohort of students in the program.⁴ These recruitment and selection processes, as discussed in Chapter 4, include multiple rounds of application review and an interview day, which involves significant participation of university faculty and staff beyond the scholars program staff. In both cases, the admissions office at the institution is involved in the scholars program recruitment and selection process, even though neither of my cases are located within the same division of the university as the admission office. This cross-departmental collaboration between admissions offices and scholars programs in the recruitment and selection process shows that scholars program do not operate in isolation; it requires many different pieces of the institution to keep recruitment and selection processes, in particular, running. As these selection processes take place, scholars programs seek to find students who embody their program missions and meet their program goals. For example, as discussed in Chapter 4, the team selecting Newman Scholars are instructed to identify students who embody the qualities of the late Dr. Newman to keep their service-focused mission alive. The application review and the interview processes are designed to find these ideal candidates from within the pool of prospective scholars.

However, it must be noted that program operations related to student selection have been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Typically, both programs in this study rely on in-

⁴ See Chapter 4 for an in-depth discussion of recruitment and selection processes.

person interview days to select and recruit scholars. However, such large-scale events are not possible when travel and gathering sizes have to be restricted for purposes of health and safety. Now that selection processes have to operate in a virtual space, at least to some degree, they may start to look different from the typical processes described in Chapter 4. The long-term effects of these changes remain to be seen, but a big implication is that scholars program selection processes built around bringing prospective students to campus to engage in an interview and recruitment weekend are undergoing change which may be temporary, or transformative. Without the opportunity for traditional interview and recruitment weekends, scholars programs may have to look beyond their standard operations to find other ways to select scholars that align with their program mission and goals.

Resources Associated with Program Dimension. In discussing this third program dimension, I define resources broadly to include human resources, financial resources, and prestige as a resource.⁵ Looking at human resources, evidence from the interviews shows that scholars programs utilize human resources well beyond their program directors. Much of the work of these program directors is highly seasonal with peaks that cannot be managed by the program staffs alone. Scholars program directors are asked to do much with little in relation to their time, and there is a lingering question among administrators at both of my cases about how much human power is needed to run a scholars program. Both programs rely on support from other faculty and staff, and the Presidential Scholars Program also relies on a team of student workers to help support program operations, but the director role itself is often poorly defined and overly demanding, especially given that both program directors in this study have other responsibilities in addition to running the scholars programs.

⁵ See Chapter 4 for a more expanded discussion of program resources.

Looking at financial resources, interview data in this study showed that scholars programs operate primarily on funding found in university operating budgets, and not from program specific endowments. Program directors and other staff indicated that some donative funds are utilized and that there are future fundraising goals, but as things stand now, scholars programs can create a big financial burden on the institutions, despite their other benefits. As referenced in the literature around institutional prestige, maintaining such prestige can be expensive (Kilgore, 2009), so perhaps scholars programs are another example of the cost of prestige. Alternatively, the prestige built by scholars programs does provide prestige for the students who are members and for the institutions where they are housed. As evidenced by the findings of this study, substantial financial and human resources are needed to maintain the prestige element present in scholars programs and the ways in which they operate.

Scholarship Funds Offered to Students Dimension. Speaking specifically to the main financial resource inherent to scholars programs, scholarship funds, interview and document data in this study showed that scholars programs tend to award tuition scholarships to their students. Quite obviously, funding tuition scholarship primarily from university operating budgets costs institutions a great deal of money. Sometimes, as in the case of the Presidential Scholars Program, scholars programs may also include the cost of room and board. Other times, in the case of the Presidential Scholars Program international trip and the Newman Scholars Program service trips, scholars program may also cover travel expenses that support scholar experiences and build community. While such benefits offered to students through these additional funded experiences are beneficial to students, they do represent yet another large cost for institution. Despite the benefits to both students and institutions inherent to operating scholars programs, there may be a question about the benefits in relation to the large amount of financial resources

being dispensed. While this study did not seek to answer this additional question, it is most certainly worth noting in the discussion of scholarship funding that is costly to institutions. Furthermore, since the programs are funded by annual revenue, they do not have permanent funding to secure their existence into the future.

Programmatic Experiences for Students Dimension. Aside from scholarship funds themselves, the programmatic experiences in which students participate seem to be one of the most noteworthy dimensions of scholars programs and one of the keys ways in which they operate. The findings for this dimension covered three main areas: retreats, other programmatic experiences, and organic interactions, each of which provides insight into how scholars programs operate. First, scholars programs organize a retreat for their students as a means of building community. Truly, having a retreat seems to legitimize a scholars program from the student perspective based on the feedback Presidential Scholars have provided to their program directors over the years. Second, scholars programs organize other events for their students that are also designed to build community and develop students in many ways. Building community and gaining access to special events is deemed important and valuable to students according to the faculty and staff who work with them. This suggests that effective scholars programs operate by engaging students in special and meaningful programming. Third, students in scholars programs benefit from organic interactions with their peers, faculty, staff, and administrators. Data from my interviews produced many stories about how students in scholars programs value the connections they make as part of their experience. Related to the second key point in this section, these findings suggest that scholars programs can benefit from creating many opportunities through which their scholars can interact organically. Both the structured programming and those information interactions are important to what students do as members of scholars programs.

In addition, this is the dimension of scholars programs that is most at risk due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The core operations of scholars programs are predicated on a traditional, in-person college experience, and right now, such operations are not feasible. This is a true weakness of scholars programs, as it is currently unclear how much of the virtual interactions in higher education will remain once the pandemic has ended. Furthermore, the reliance on in-person activities limits the utility of scholars programs for non-residential or less residential colleges and universities. Scholars programs were previously relying on an in-person college experience to build affinity within their programs, and currently such operations are simply not feasible. The Newman Scholars Program's first-year seminar course is being taught virtually, and the Presidential Scholars Program's one-day retreat was switched to a virtual format. If students continue to demand more virtual interactions after the pandemic passes, scholars programs may face a challenging decision of how they can best engage their students in a way that meets student demands but stays true to the core mission and goals of the program. With all of this in mind, the findings related to programmatic experiences can only describe how scholars programs have operated up until now.

Outcomes Associated with Program Dimension. Through each of these student experiences, program directors prioritized a student's development, connectedness, and feeling connected with the program over all other outcomes associated with scholars programs. I was surprised to find that the main desired outcomes of scholars programs, these more intangible qualities, do not align with the main student success metrics sought out by institutions of higher education (i.e. retention and graduation). Perhaps program staff and university partners are less concerned with traditional student outcomes since students in scholars programs are already high-achieving at the point of admission, but this was the one area where the findings provided a

great deal of surprise. Scholars programs tended to demonstrate less interest in students' academic outcomes as tied to the program than they did these more developmental or emotionally-based outcomes. As I will discuss later in this chapter, this represents an area for additional research since the findings were not as anticipated. It is again worth noting that I only studied two programs, but since these were chosen to represent typical programs, this operational piece of scholars programs warrants further investigation.

Program Structure Dimension. In addition to the six program dimensions above, the program structure theme provides great insight into the second research question of how scholars programs operate. As previously mentioned, program structure was one of two themes where my cases differed a great deal. For this reason and because of these differences, I chose to convert program structure from a theme to a dimension. Each of the other six dimensions is a bit more self-contained than my themes. Not to say the program dimensions do not interact at all, but each of them can be discussed on its own and is truly focused on the operations of scholars programs. Alternatively, themes, as they are being used in this study, transcend program dimensions, interact with each dimension in a different way, and represent less tangible features of scholars programs, like history and their use as targeted student recruitment programs. Since program structure is tangible, related to program operations, and a bit more self-contained, it fits into my model more accurately as a seventh program dimension.

The importance of program structure to program operations was equally important, but the two programs are structured in distinct ways that result in differences in their operations. The interview and document analysis data showed that scholars programs have different types of reporting structures. Furthermore, with so many faculty and staff across campus working to

support the operation of scholars programs, it would be quite challenging to create a typical organizational chart for a scholars program.

In one regard, admission offices have varying levels of interaction with scholars program selection process, whether that is more of an advisory role like at Academy University or a fully integrated cooperative process between the office and program staff, like at Oscar University. Given the variance in connectedness with the admission office, scholars programs may be more or less aligned with the overall recruitment goals of institutions. At the broad level, institutions seek to recruit high-achieving students and scholars programs are one means of doing so, but more nuanced goal alignment may or may not exist depending on how the admission office and the scholars program work together.

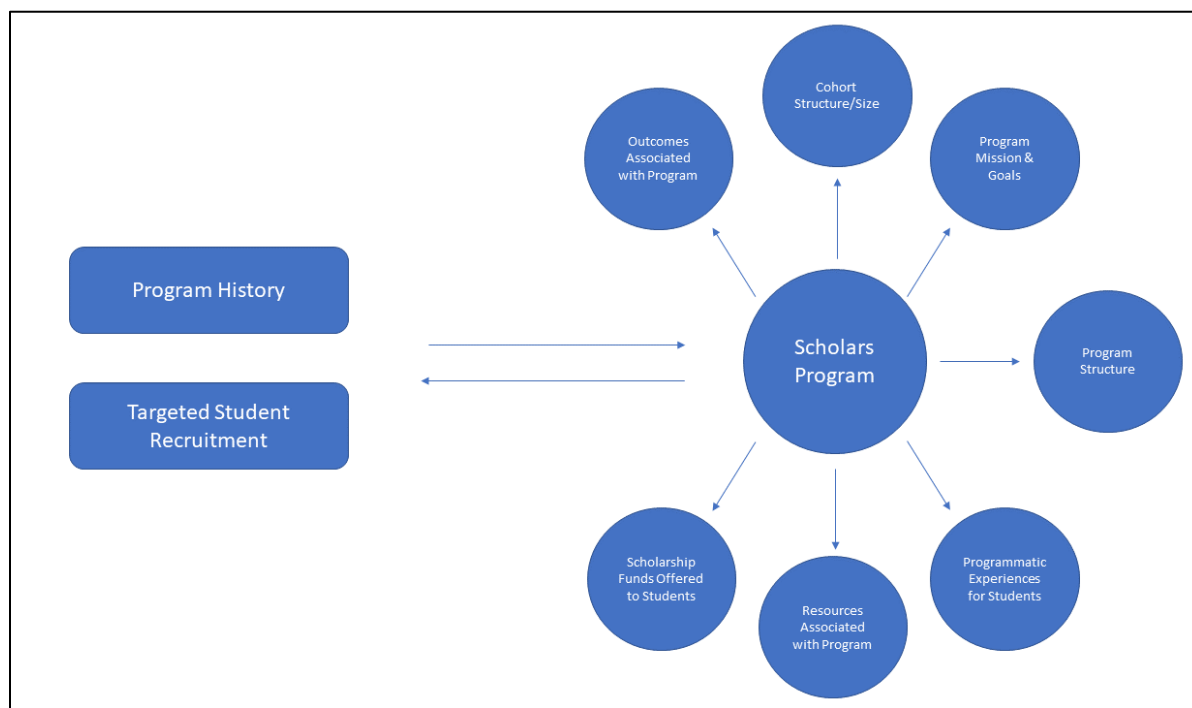
Alternatively, scholars program directors are classified differently in both of my cases. One director is a faculty member, the other is a staff member, and both have different reporting structures. However, both directors have additional work roles beyond their job running and operating the scholars programs they direct. For example, the director of the Presidential Scholars Program is also responsible for managing some of the special events that are organized through the Office of the President. The director of the Newman Scholars Program also teaches classes, conducts research, and maintains institutional committee assignments outside of the Newman Scholars seminar as a regular faculty member.

Similarly, as it would be challenging to create an organizational chart with so many dotted line relationships, it would be difficult to universally define the role of a scholars program director and what they do to run these programs. The divergence in the findings tied to this theme are interesting, as I selected two typical scholars programs and both are still vastly

different in structure. Given the divergence of structure, this reinforces the importance of making program structure a seventh dimension as opposed to a third theme.

Conclusion. In sum, these seven dimensions provide substantial insight into how scholars programs operate. Figure 2 shows a conceptual model incorporating my seventh program dimension, program structure, and my two emergent themes, program history and targeted student recruitment. This model has been updated from its original form with the addition of my seventh dimension and by replacing the previously existing question mark (seen in Figure 1 in Chapter 3) with the program history and targeted student recruitment themes. The arrows between dimensions and themes show that they interact with one another; history and targeted, student-recruitment impact program dimensions/operations, but program dimensions also impact my themes. As an example, program dimensions drive how high-achieving students are recruited in a targeted manner.

Figure 2: Revised conceptual model for studying scholars programs



There is consistency between my two cases in most areas, leading me to feel more confident in the framework for studying scholars programs created through this conceptual model. While it is first necessary to understand why scholars programs are created to then understand how they operate, it is also necessary to understand how they operate before studying how scholars programs are leveraged to meet institutional goals. At their core, scholars programs operate by providing students with developmental and community-building opportunities by funneling resources of all kinds into those operations. They rely on their missions to inform how scholars are selected and how they operate for scholars currently in each program.

What Role do Scholars Programs Play in Helping to Meet Broader Institutional Goals?

Both the reasons for the creation of scholars programs and the ways in which they operate provide a greater understanding of how these programs are used to help meet broader institutional goals. Ultimately, institutions seek to recruit more high-achieving students, and scholars programs work to support this goal. Scholars programs draw in students who are such high-achievers that they may have attended a different, more prestigious institution if they had not been selected to participate in a scholars program. Admission office staff and scholars program staff at both institutions in my study spoke of this. At Academy University, the Newman Scholars Program has provided a great deal of brand recognition for students, while the Presidential Scholars Program at Oscar University has allowed the institution to compete for high-achieving students with more prestigious institutions.

Institutions, specifically the two cases in this study, engage in this type of student recruitment intentionally. Scholars program staff and administrators in other areas of the universities do feel they are attracting students of exceptional quality based on those programs. As an example, Julie, an admission office staff member at Oscar University specifically noted

how she has seen the Presidential Scholars Program attract students who were otherwise considering institutions with bigger, more prestigious brands. Once again revisiting program history, it is worth noting that Academy University created the Newman Scholars Program right before its own rapid rise in the national rankings, and Oscar University began to increase programming for the Presidential Scholars right on the precipice of an increase in national reputation and the start of a presence in national rankings.

Relatedly, it is worth noting that Academy University recruits students specifically for the Newman Scholars Program, as there is an application that prospective students must submit to be considered. Conversely, Oscar University does not recruit specifically for the Presidential Scholars Program since there is no additional application, but prospective students are aware of the program. Several admission office staff members pointed out the opportunity to expand actual recruiting for the program as a way in which they hoped the program could grow moving forward. Even when considering more nuanced details of my two cases, the findings of this study confidently state that scholars programs help meet broader institutional goals by engaging in the practice of helping to recruit these high-achieving students.

At their core, scholars programs seek to recruit high-achieving students. Given the findings of this study, it seems that growing and supporting a scholars program could help an institution recruit more high-achieving students to their student body. Furthermore, scholars programs relay on personalized recruitment for prospective students and personalized experiences for current scholars to attract potential scholars to these programs and their home campuses. A student's decision to enroll at a particular institution of higher education is influenced by student personal characteristics, institutional characteristics, how institutions communicate with them, feedback from meaningful individual in their lives, and their

expectations of what the true student experience will be (Chapman, 1981). By recruiting as scholars programs do, they are relying on student characteristics (high-achievement), institutional communication (and personalization), and high student experience expectations set during on-campus interview weekends to recruit students. As seminal admission literature stated, students tend to behave as consumers when making a large “purchase” like choosing an institution, and such high-risk purchases are highly personal decisions (Litten et al., 1983). Once again, scholars programs excel by making the student recruitment process highly personal. Students value the personal touch and the programs’ ability to make them feel special throughout the recruitment and selection process. As both the Newman Scholars Program and the Presidential Scholars Program noted, once scholarship finalists have arrived on campus for their scholarship interviews, the institution hopes as many of those students as possible will choose to enroll, regardless of how many scholarship dollars they receive or whether or not they are selected for a scholars program.

The conclusions related to this research question, in particular, tie back to my broader problem of practice. Recruiting high-achieving students is particularly meaningful for high-achieving students. From the findings of this study, it is clear that high-achieving students in scholars programs are seen by institutional faculty and staff as benefitting the institutions. One reason for this could be the prestige element high-achieving students bring to institutions (Cook & Frank, 1993; Hoxby, 2009; Kilgore, 2009), or what scholars program participants contribute to the campus community. As Tom, the Dean of Admission at Oscar University, described Presidential Scholars as:

[students] who are going to seek knowledge for its own sake, who will drive conversation, who will be able to instinctively and creatively find the links between

seemingly disparate ideas, and who can apply that same sort of rigorous approach to what they're doing outside the classroom as well, and therefore be leaders on this campus, and lead by representing the President. They're almost an extension of the Office of the President.

Through this line of thinking, which was present in both cases, there is evidence that institutions see benefits in having students in scholars programs on their campuses. Furthermore, as institutions see benefits in having other types of students on their campuses (i.e. first-generation students or racially minoritized students), the same model in this study can be used to assess programs targeting other groups of students.

As was discussed in relation to the cohort structure and size dimension and the programmatic experiences for students dimension, the COVID-19 pandemic has completely upended the ways in which scholars programs are able to recruit students. Scholars programs' recruitment plans depend on the ability to operate in person, get students on campus, and recruit them using the tactics outlined above. Without the ability to roll out red carpets, show off their campuses, and preview special experiences for current scholars, program staff in this study expressed concern about the alternative plans they will have to undertake. Institutions will still expect to recruit high-achieving students, and scholars programs will still be expected to recruit this student population in a targeted manner, but exactly how that happens, what changes temporarily, and what changes permanently are currently unknown. Scholars programs truly can be used to help institutions boost their reputations and levels of prestige through the recruitment of exceptional students (Kilgore, 2009), but many questions remain about how this process evolves moving forward.

Concluding Thoughts on Implications

Now that I have answered all three research questions, I can better address the larger problem of practice related to the recruitment of high-achieving students. As discussed in Chapter 1, student recruitment, especially the recruitment of high-achieving students, is growing increasingly competitive for institutions of higher education. Scholars programs are studied here as one means by which institutions can recruit high-achieving students, though little was known about these programs prior to my study. Ultimately, the third research question of how scholars programs are used to meet broader institutional goals connects to my problem of practice most intensely. Simply stated, this study shows that scholars programs can be used as a mechanism for recruiting high-achieving students in a targeted manner.

As discussed previously in this section, my three research questions build on one another. First, it is necessary to understand why scholars programs are created. As this study shows, they are created to recruit high achieving students. Second, it is important to understand how scholars programs operate, both in their recruitment and selection operations and their experiences for current students. Third and finally, it is possible to understand how scholars programs are utilized to meet broader institutional goals, namely the goal of recruiting high-achieving students in a targeted manner. The answers to each of these three research questions provides great insight into how an institution can effectively operate a scholars program to more effectively recruit high-achieving students in today's increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

Recommendations

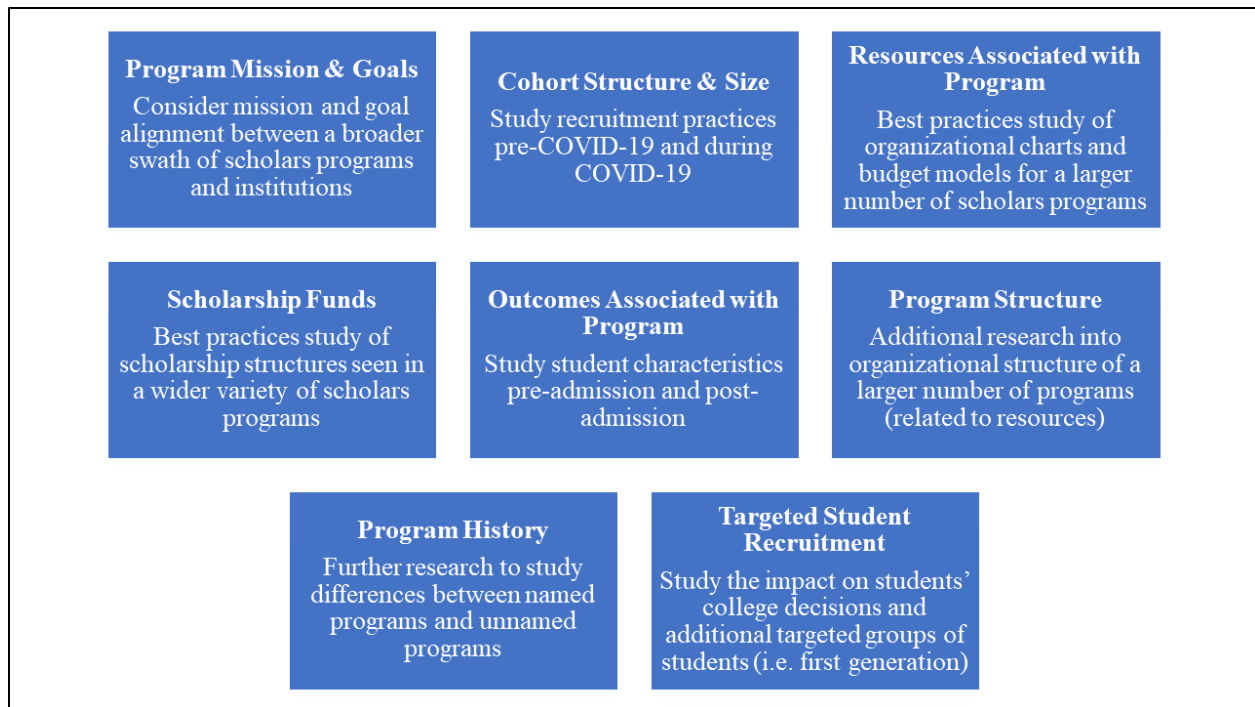
In light of my research and having answered my three research questions, I will now address the implications of this research for practitioners and for future research through discussing my recommendations. First, I discuss recommendations for future research as they relate to the program dimensions and themes discussed earlier in this study. Second, I provide

recommendations for practice. Each of these sections includes the program dimensions and themes described earlier in this study as relevant. Many of the recommendations in both sections connect back to the importance studying students in scholars programs to better understand the role they play in students' admission decisions and on-campus experiences, so this is a common theme seen in the remainder of this chapter. Studying students was not the focus of this particular study, but including them will be quite important in future research. Below, I begin with recommendations for future research and conclude with recommendations for practitioners working with scholars programs.

Recommendations for Future Research

The biggest takeaway in terms of recommendations for future research is that more research on scholars programs is needed at nearly every level of the phenomenon. Much of this does include the need to study students, but other types of additional research needs emerged during the course of this study. Below, I discuss 10 such recommendations (also seen in Figure 3) that cohere around the dimensions and themes overviewed earlier in this study.

Figure 3: Summary of recommendations for future research



Program Mission and Goals. Simply put, program mission and goals are of great importance and should align with the broader mission and goals of the institution housing each scholars program. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, scholars programs have a mission of recruiting and engaging high-achieving students. This core purpose explains why scholars programs exist and helps to elucidate the reasoning behind their operations. Though they tend to connect with strategic plans to varying degrees, my findings left no question as to the mission of scholars programs.

With this in mind, I make one key recommendation for further research. A study that considers the mission and goal alignment between a wider swath of scholars programs and their home institution would allow researchers to determine the relationship between program purpose and institutional mission as well as the types of students that scholars programs seek to recruit. This would allow researchers to see the ways in which high-achieving students are defined, which may vary by institution, and how scholars programs and institutions work together to

recruit them. Each of these three recommendations would allow for a deeper understanding of the importance of program mission and goals and what this program dimension looks like in operation, as well as providing broader insight into the student recruitment challenges discussed in my study.

Cohort Structure and Size. My study has proven that scholars programs rely on intensive selection processes to help identify each new cohort of highly desirable students. Admission offices are involved, the program staff works to identify ideal student qualities for their programs, and personalized recruitment tactics take center stage. However, all of the normal ways in which scholars programs seek to craft their cohorts have been changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Considering this change, I make one recommendation for further research related to this shift in recruitment operations. Researchers seeking to better understand scholars programs could conduct a study of scholars program recruitment practices pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19. If structured as a broader study of best practices, it would be interesting to note which programs have changed which pieces of their recruitment plans and how. Obviously, some of this information is proprietary, but my two typical cases show that the core elements of a recruitment and selection process are highly similar between scholars programs. As part of this research, it would be interesting to include student perspectives on both pre- and mid-COVID-19 pandemic recruitment operations to determine how effective each set of practices was from the perspective of current scholars. Each of these recommendations would allow practitioners to be better prepared for whatever changes to scholars program recruitment are to come and how those might impact their ability to craft a cohort of scholars with the intent of bringing a group of high-achieving students into the institution.

Resources Associated with Program. As discussed previously, scholars programs are highly resource dependent and tend to heavily tax human and financial resources as they strive to increase institutional prestige by recruiting high achieving students. Scholars program directors, for example, often have other responsibilities and small, or no, staffs dedicated to helping them operate. Campus partners and student workers may be utilized to support core program staff. Financial resources, too, may create quite a burden for institutions, as scholars programs are funded most heavily through university operating budgets.

From a research perspective, I recommend a study of organizational charts and budget models for scholars programs. To better understand how scholars programs operate and the resources they require, researchers should look to see if there is any baseline or best practice for what is typical, realizing that this may be dependent on program size. This study could include collecting data on the organizational charts and budget models for all of the scholars programs that are members of the Undergraduate Scholars Program Administrators Association (USPAA), then comparing program staff sizes, reporting structures, and budget sizes across institutions. Additionally, the study could segment programs and institutions based on enrollment size, institutional endowment size, or other factors that may impact how resources are allocated to the scholars programs. Such a study would better inform our understanding of scholars programs but could also be highly interesting in light of the institutional audits recommended for practitioners above.

Scholarship Funds Offered to Students. In discussing resources, there is no greater financial resource required of scholars programs than the ability to offer scholarship funds to students. Scholars programs mostly award tuition scholarships along with some other scattered funding opportunities for housing and travel. Ultimately, this is expensive, and frequently funded

through operational budget instead of endowment support. The benefits students experience through receipt of these funds are highly valuable, but they represent a massive cost for institutions.

Related to my recommendation for researchers overviewed with the program resources dimensions, I recommend a study of scholarship funding structures relying on a wider selection of scholars programs to determine best practices. With this, I mean understanding the value of scholarship amounts that are offered to students in various scholars programs and where those dollars tend to come from within the institution. Do most scholars programs award full tuition? Partial tuition? Full cost of attendance? This study could also include an element that examines the financial impact of scholarship dollars on students. For example, how much of the true cost of college is covered? Are these students relying on scholars program support alone or in conjunction with other types of financial aid? Since I only studied two programs, albeit typical programs, it is currently difficult to draw broad conclusions about best practices. However, understanding the financial impact of these dollars on a student's ultimate college choice, as well as the impact on their actual cost of attendance, would provide a great deal of insight into the challenging nature of recruiting high-achieving students. Yet again, students, in particular the role scholars program funding played in their college decisions, would need to be studied to strengthen this understanding. Best practice research and critical self-analysis will help better understand student scholarships just as they will provide insight into program resources of all varieties.

Outcomes Associated with Program. This sixth program dimension was situated a bit differently in my study, as my findings differed greatly from what I anticipated I would learn. Scholars programs are more concerned with developmental than academic outcomes, as program

directors, administrators, faculty, and staff in my interviews all spoke more readily to hoping students would find community and connection rather than hoping students would graduate. As discussed previously in this chapter, faculty and staff may just be assuming that these high-achieving students do not present great graduation and retention risks.

For future research, I recommend a study that considers the academic characteristics of students in scholars programs pre-admission and post-admission. Perhaps students in scholars programs just tend not to be the types of students who present academic risk, but we currently do not have any sort of concrete evidence to support this supposition. There is much that could be done in both regards to better understand how students benefit from their membership in scholars programs. The recommendation outlined here represents merely a starting point.

Program Structure. The findings of my study related to my seventh and final dimension, program structure, show that scholars program structures are different and allow programs to operate in different ways. There is no typical scholars program organizational chart or program director role, despite the fact that I studied two typical scholars programs.

Looking ahead to further research, I recommend a study on the organizational structures of scholars programs more broadly. As another type of best practice research, this would have benefits from both the academic and practical standpoints. Since I have only studied two scholars programs and they both have different structures, it makes drawing conclusions beyond, “structure has an impact,” quite challenging. By looking at a wider variety of programs in this regard, researchers will be able to draw broader conclusions and practitioners will be able to make more thoughtful structural decisions.

Program History. Recommendations related to my findings in emergent program themes are equally important for allowing us to better understand scholars programs, why they

exist, what they do, and how they help institutions meet broader goals. From the historical perspective, history drives program operations and was considered heavily by both of my cases when making changes to their programs. Scholars programs were created to recruit high-achieving students, and this historical mission continues to drive program goals, as discussed previously in this chapter.

In considering opportunities for further research, I recommend a study that considers the potential differences between named scholars programs and unnamed scholars programs. As seen in this study, there are different histories between the Newman Scholars Program, named for Dr. Paul Newman, and the Presidential Scholars Program that is not currently named for any one particular individual. There could be a difference between how these two types of naming structures play into program history, changes over time, and traditions, but further research is needed. In all of these recommendations, there is a call to consider program history in light of the current environment and needs of students so that scholars programs can continue to honor their traditions while meeting the needs of their students.

Targeted Student Recruitment. Overall, the entirety of my findings supports the conclusion that scholars programs are utilized to help institutions recruit high-achieving students. This ties back to the problem of practice under consideration in this study: the increasing challenges associated with recruiting high-achieving students and how scholars programs are deployed to do so. As discussed previously, scholars programs rely on personalized recruitment tactics, deep student connections, and a thorough campus visit and interview under normal circumstances, but COVID-19 has changed the ways in which programs are able to recruit.

From the research perspective, I make three recommendations. First, additional research is needed to learn more about what helps students in scholars programs make their college

decisions. We have broad research on student college choice, and my study provides anecdotal evidence from faculty, staff, and administrators about college choice as related to scholars programs, but an entire study on this more nuanced type of college choice and students' direct involvement would be incredibly beneficial to the greater body of literature and practitioners alike. Second, I would recommend an additional study to analyze scholars programs at institutions in varying prestige categories to truly understand the relationship between scholars programs and institutional prestige. Again, my study provides a great deal of evidence that scholars programs increase prestige, but I have only studied two institutions here. Looking at institutions in varying categories of selectivity would greatly increase the understanding of the interplay between scholars programs and prestige.

Lastly, and once again broadening the impact this research on scholars programs could have for higher education, I recommend further research into how the framework I have created here can be applied to other types of targeted student recruitment programs. Scholars programs are a typical targeted student recruitment program, and I studied two typical scholars programs, so the framework itself could be applicable to studying programs targeting minoritized student populations or first generation college students, among other groups. Broadening the way my framework is used will add to the body of literature on student recruitment and allow practitioners to deploy targeted student recruitment programs of many varieties more effectively. All three of these recommendations relate to the problem of practice considered in this study, which focuses on the increasingly challenging environment present when recruiting high-achieving students to an institution.

Concluding Thoughts on Recommendations for Future Research. In considering all of my recommendations in totality, a key future research opportunity would be to consider

additional scholars programs (or types of programs more broadly), since a two-case comparative case study in a previously unstudied area truly represents the tip of the iceberg in terms of researching scholars programs. I aimed to conduct an exploratory study, and now that this framework for research has been defined there are plenty of opportunities to dig deeper and better understand this mechanism for recruiting high-achieving students.

Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations for practitioners represent a diverse set of suggestions to allow faculty, staff, and administrators to more effectively manage and interface with scholars programs. Since this study was interested in answering three research questions, there is no central theme or cohering element in the recommendations that follow. With this in mind, the recommendations that follow are organized very concretely around the themes and dimensions outlined previously. Figure 4 also provides an overview of the 17 recommendations I highlight in the section below.

Figure 4: Summary of recommendations for practices



Program Mission and Goals. To reiterate a statement made earlier in this chapter, mission and goals provide a strong foundation for scholars programs and, ideally, should find strong alignment with broader institutional goals. With this in mind, I make two recommendations for practice. First, program staff should consider the types of students their institution seeks to recruit when building or reviewing a scholars program. For example, if an institution is looking to increase community engagement among students, perhaps a scholars program with a mission of recruiting outstanding service-minded students could be beneficial to the institution. Second, in order to craft a strong scholars program, directors and administrators should ensure that there is clear alignment between the program's mission and goals and the institution's strategic plan. The ability to clearly point to those areas of similarity and cohesiveness will allow the scholars program to better support broader institutional goals. Both of these practical recommendations relate directly to my problem of practice, as they will allow institutions to recruit the high-achieving students they desire more effectively.

Cohort Structure and Size. The process of selecting and crafting a cohort of scholars for each of the programs in this study was quite robust and holistic. These processes, however, were strongly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Considering both normal operations and the upended cohort selection processes, I make two recommendations for practice. First, it is important for scholars program staff to explicitly state the recruitment goals of scholars programs and share them with involved parties, like the admission office, up front to ensure goal alignment. Goal alignment was discussed in the previous set of recommendations, too, but the importance of this alignment touches many dimensions of scholars programs. Second, program directors and staff are encouraged to consider alternative means of student recruitment (i.e. interviews and campus visits) now, in the event some of the virtual engagement pieces associated with COVID-19 remain in practice after the pandemic ends. We cannot know what prospective students will expect of colleges after the conclusion of the pandemic, so scholars programs need to be prepared. The implications could have substantial impacts on the high-achieving student recruitment goals considered in my problem of practice. Students will continue to expect all of the personalized recruitment discussed previously in this chapter, so all parties involved in scholars program recruitment need to be prepared and on the same page related to goals.

Resources Associated with Program. Since scholars programs are so resource-dependent and rely on so many human and financial resources, I recommend two ways in which practitioners can allocate scholars program resources more effectively. First, administrators should conduct both staff and budgetary audits to ensure that resources are being leveraged appropriately given the prestige a scholars program brings to an institution. Maintenance of prestige is expensive (Kilgore, 2009), but prestige is important to institutional reputations, so the

findings of such an audit need to be considered carefully. It is important to consider that I did not have access to program budgets during the course of my study, so it may be that scholars programs are operating with less funding than they truly need to perform their key function of recruiting high-achieving students. As mentioned earlier, student perspectives should be considered in this process to see if they are in alignment with the perspectives of the program directors and staff. Furthermore, I encourage administrators to examine the job descriptions and workloads for their scholars program directors. Are their duties and the time that they have available reasonably balanced? Does the program need a full-time director, or will a part-time director do? Critical analysis of human power needed to run scholars programs is necessary, as there is a clear human resource shortfall in relation to scholars programs.

Scholarship Funds Offered to Students. Scholars programs expend a great deal of financial resources, most of which come in the form of scholarship funds for students. This costly undertaking is typically funded by university operating budgets. Given this financial burden, I recommend that scholars program staff and administrators consider fundraising initiatives to lighten the cost incurred by the operating budget. Both programs in this study are engaging in fundraising to some degree, but I recommend a larger undertaking in this area, both related to liquid dollars and endowment growth. Furthermore, I recommend that program staff take time to understand what matters to students in their scholars programs and why. Traditions are wonderful, but if there is an expensive tradition that is not meaningful to students, practitioners should consider its value rather than placing its traditional value away from analysis. For example, if a scholars program is organizing a very costly retreat, and the retreat does not produce much value for students (in contrast to what was seen in this study with the Newman Scholars Program retreat), it may not be worth continuing to fund a retreat where

students see little benefit. Both of these recommendations could be bolstered by including students in the discussion. What types of funded experiences would be most appealing and impactful to students? It does not appear that college tuition prices are decreasing, and scholars programs will continue to offer scholarship funds to students, so a critical spending analysis and some additional fundraising will help to alleviate these increasing cost concerns.

Programmatic Experiences for Students. The funds described above are, in part, used to operate programming for scholars that is built around the value placed on community and connection, but also exclusivity. Students in scholars programs enjoy participating in community building through program retreats and organic interactions, but some of the appeal behind their events is that they are only designed for specific scholars. Given these programming goals and outcomes, I make three recommendations for practice.

First, I recommend that program staff assess their retreats to understand why these experiences matter so much to students. I was able to hear the importance behind the retreats secondhand from my interviews with program staff, but it would be interesting and meaningful for program staff to know which elements of these retreats make them so important and impactful for students by talking to the students themselves.

Second, some of these programmatic experiences serve to create exclusivity in a good way, but others would be beneficial to all students. I challenge administrators and program staff to determine what scholars programs are doing that could be applied to all students. Exclusivity can be problematic within a college campus (Stich, 2018), especially when such exclusivity provides students with critical student success benefits like feelings of community and connectedness.

Third, I recommend that program staff seriously consider the long-term implications of COVID-19 on which types of programmatic experiences they offer to scholars. For example, organic interactions and other kinds of programming may not be as effective if there is a permanent shift to some of the operations we have taken on during the pandemic (i.e. hybrid campus access). Again, it is hard to know what these impacts will be long-term, but I urge program directors and staff to start thinking critically now. Yet again, it is critical to involve students in scholars programs in these conversations. All three of these recommendations combined would allow program directors and other staff to provide their scholars with more meaningful and relevant experiences while possibly scaling up their meaningful experiences to benefit a wider swath of students.

Outcomes Associated with Program. As discussed previously in this chapter, the findings in this study demonstrated that scholars programs are more interested in developmental student outcomes than more measurable academic outcomes. Given the fact that these developmental outcomes were discussed only anecdotally, I suggest conducting an assessment of student outcomes to better understand whether or not students are really experiencing the developmental outcomes program directors have intended for them to experience. These feelings of community and connectedness could be better understood and measured after conducting such assessment of students in scholars programs. Once again, this is a place where involving students in the assessment directly will have great value to scholars program personnel.

Program Structure. Both of the programs in this study varied in structure more so than any other dimension or theme. This high level of structural variance led me to craft two recommendations for practice.

My first recommendation for practices addresses the dotted line relationship between scholars program staff and admission office. I advise these groups to work together on selection process planning and goal setting to better bring the admission office into the process and create more effective goal alignment. Doing so will allow the scholars program to better meeting the goals of its institution in relation to recruitment, providing even greater insight into the problem of practice discussed in this study. Thinking about the program director more specifically, I encourage institutions to conduct additional analysis into the roles of scholars program directors. In the meantime, administrators need to take a serious look at what is being asked of their program directors. As the faculty member at Oscar University noted, operating with a “staff of goodwill” is not sustainable in the long term.

Program History. History, one of the emerging themes in this study, impacted program operations at many levels and was considered to have great importance at both cases in this study. The value placed on history leads me to make two recommendations for practice.

From a practitioner standpoint, I first encourage program directors to take a look at tradition: which traditions still make sense in light of the current environment and which no longer do so? Oscar University is already doing this in considering the future of their etiquette dinner, and I would recommend further evaluation that includes direct incorporation of student feedback along this line. Second, program directors should consider new means of connecting that could be balanced with old traditional events. Especially as the definition of high-achieving students continues to evolve, this kind of self-analysis will be important and allow for more effective recruitment of the desired group of students, related to my problem of practice. Some traditions may maintain their relevance and value into perpetuity, but others may not as the needs and interests of students change.

Targeted Student Recruitment. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted this particular theme immensely, but recruiting new scholars each year remains one of the most important practices in which scholars program engage. Given the importance of recruitment for these programs and the uncertainty of the future of student recruitment in general, I recommend that scholars program directors and other offices involved in these processes (i.e. admission offices) critically consider the existing recruitment plans for scholars programs. Which portions *must* be conducted in person? What might be able to occur virtually? Is there a way to intentionally blend virtual and in-person recruitment effectively now that a new world of virtual opportunities has been opened up to this field? How do the students who are currently part of scholars programs feel about this? The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on admission and student recruitment are unknown. Scholars programs would be remiss to go back to their old ways of business without taking time to talk to students and examine whether or not they are recruiting as effectively as they could be in this space, which is of critical importance to the broader institutions in which they are housed.

Concluding Thoughts on Recommendations for Practice. My recommendations for practice all focus around intentionality, goal congruence, and better assessing and understanding what scholars programs are doing. Scholars programs can be used to recruit high-achieving students very intentionally, so each of the recommendations provided here would help them to function more effectively in that regard. It is worth emphasizing again that I studied a previously unstudied phenomenon in higher education. Scholars programs seem to have quite a bit of purpose and meaning behind their creation, so now there is an opportunity to match that kind of intentionality with how programs actually operate so that they can better assist institutions in meeting broader goals. By doing so, these recommendations essentially tie together the answers

to all three of my research questions. My very last recommendation related to targeted student recruitment proposes applying this framework for studying scholars programs to other types of targeted student recruitment programs. Such a study would allow institutions to analyze and possibly deploy programs that target other groups institutions of higher education seek to enroll. The fact that my study includes two typical scholars programs rather than unusual ones will allow for this kind of transferability.

Conclusion

At the onset of this project, I set out to conduct an exploratory study of scholars programs, and I relied on a comparative case study of two typical scholars programs that align with my proposed drivers of scholars programs to do so. To begin to better understand scholars programs, I sought to answer three research question: (a) Why are scholars programs created?; (b) How do scholars programs operate?; and (c) What role do scholars programs play in helping to meet broader institutional goals? I answered all of these questions by conducting interviews and document analysis at two cases and comparing my findings across the two. My findings were collected across seven program dimensions (program mission and goals, cohort structure and size, resources associated with program, scholarship funds offered to students, programmatic experiences for students, outcomes associated with program, and program structure) and two themes that emerged during the course of my research (program history and targeted student recruitment). Most of my findings were rather similar between the two cases, though there were a few differences in nuances related to program history and structure.

Evidence from both my interviews and the documents I analyzed across these dimensions and themes makes clear that scholars programs are used to recruit a targeted group of students, in this case high-achieving students. Furthermore, my findings show how scholars programs

operate to do so. This study is meaningful because it fills a gap in the literature, provides insight for practitioners on a currently unstudied area, and shows areas for future research, including how the framework I have developed can be used to study, assess, and create different types of targeted student programs. What I originally saw to be somewhat of an institutional enigma has now been proven to be rather intentional, and the framework and recommendations I developed can allow scholars programs to function with even greater intentionality moving forward.

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**Appendix A: Undergraduate Scholars Program Administrators Association
(USPAA) Member Institutions and Programs**

Institution	Scholars Program
Appalachian State University	James Center for Appalachian Educators
Appalachian State University	SECU Appalachian Partnership Scholarship
Appalachian State University	University Scholarships
Appalachian State University	Wilson Scholars Program
Centre College	Brown Fellows
Centre College	Lincoln Scholars Program
Clemson University	Calhoun Honors College
Clemson University	National Scholars Program
Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation	The Coca-Cola Scholars Program Scholarship
College of Charleston	William Aiken Fellows Society
College of William & Mary	1693 Scholars Program
Duke University	Office of Undergraduate Scholars and Fellows
Duke University	Robertson Scholars Leadership Program
East Carolina University	EC Scholars Program
East Tennessee State	Roan Scholars Leadership Program
Emory University	Emory Scholars Program
Furman University	Furman Community of Scholars
Georgia Institute of Technology	Stamps Presidential Scholarship Program
Indiana University	Chapman Scholars Program
Ithaca College	Park Scholar Program
Johns Hopkins University	Baltimore Scholars Program
Johns Hopkins University	National Fellowships Program
Louisiana State University	Enrollment Management
North Carolina A&T State University	Dowdy Scholars Enrichment Program
North Carolina State University	Goodnight Scholars Program
North Carolina State University	Park Scholarships
Ohio State University	Eminence Fellows
Ohio University	Manasseh Cutler Scholars Program
Partner Schools	Stamps Scholars
Santa Clara University	Johnson Scholars Program
Southern Illinois University	Chancellor's Scholars Program
Southern Methodist University	Hunt Leadership Scholars Program
U.S. Air Force Academy	Air Force Academy Scholars
University of Florida	Honors Program
University of Georgia	Foundation Fellows

University of Louisville	Grawemeyer Scholars
University of Maryland	Banneker/Key Scholarship
University of Michigan	Stamps Leadership Scholars
University of Nebraska at Omaha	College of Business Administration Scholars Academy
University of New Mexico	Regents Scholars
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Innovation Scholars Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Morehead-Cain Scholars Program
University of Texas at Austin	Forty Acres Scholars Program
University of Texas at Dallas	The Eugene McDermott Scholars Program
University of Texas at San Antonio	Terry Scholars Program
University of Texas at San Antonio	UTSA Top Scholars
Virginia Tech	University Honors
Washington University in Saint Louis	Annika Rodriguez Scholars Program
Washington University in Saint Louis	Danforth Scholars
Washington University in Saint Louis	John B. Ervin Scholars Program

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Program Directors and Upper-Level Administrators

Research Questions: Why are scholars programs created, how do they operate, and what role to they play in helping meet broader institutional goals?

Interview Subjects: Scholars program directors and upper-level administrators at case study sites

Interviewee Demographic Information (to be collected at the conclusion of each interview):

- Name (alias):
- Title:
- Number of total years in higher education:
- Number of years in current role:
- Level of education:
- Employment with any other scholars programs:

Interview Questions:

- Grand Tour Question: How would you describe your program to someone who knows nothing about it?
- Q1 (Mission and Goals): Tell me the story of this scholars program. How and why was it first created?
 - Probes: donors, institutional priorities, admission goals, rankings, key players in the creation process
- Q2 (Cohort Structure and Size): How are students selected to be a part of this program?
 - Probes: selection committees, applications, program selectivity, review forms
- Q3 (Programmatic Experiences, Scholarship Funds): What are the benefits to students who are a part of your scholars program?
 - Probes: scholarship, special events, unique experiences
- Q4 (Programmatic Experiences): How are student experiences crafted in your program?
- Q5 (Resources Associated with Program): Tell me about any strategic partnerships you engage in across campus. Who are your most frequently used campus partners?
- Q6 (Resources Associated with Program): Describe any strategic partnerships you engage with outside of campus.
 - Probes: external alumni associations, community agencies
- Q7 (Outcomes): What do you hope your students will get out of their experience in the program?
 - Probes: learning outcomes
- Q8 (Outcomes, Mission and Goals): How does your program interact with the university's current strategic plan?
- Q9 (Mission and Goals): Looking forward what are your short-term goals for the program? What about longer-term goals?
 - Probes: any goals that have come as directives and from who

- Q10 (Mission and Goals): What type of directives have you received, if any, about how this program should be utilized to help meet your institution's overall goals?
- Q11 (All Dimensions): How has your program changed over the years?
 - Probes: purpose, selection criteria, structural changes
- Q12 (All Dimensions): Tell me about the documents associated with your program and institution that you feel would be most helpful to my further study of your program.
 - Probes: strategic plans, annual reports
- Concluding Question: Is there anything else you would like me to include about this scholars program or your role working with it?

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Mid-Level Staff

Research Questions: Why are scholars programs created, how do they operate, and what role to they play in helping meet broader institutional goals?

Interview Subjects: Other university staff members who interface with scholars programs at case study sites (e.g. admission office staff, financial aid staff, faculty)

Interviewee Demographic Information (to be collected at the conclusion of each interview):

- Name (alias):
- Title:
- Number of total years in higher education:
- Number of years in current role:
- Level of education:
- Other experiences with scholars programs:

Interview Questions:

- Grand Tour Question: How would you describe your role working with or in relation to the scholars program?
- Q1: (Mission and Goals): Tell me the story of this scholars program as you know it. How do you view its purpose within the university?
 - Probes: donors, institutional priorities, admission goals, rankings
- Q2: (Cohort Structure and Size): How are students selected to be a part of this program?
 - Probes: selection committees, applications, program selectivity, review forms
- Q3: (Programmatic Experiences): Tell me about what students do as members of your program. How do you create programming for the students in your program?
 - Probes: service projects, courses, travel, social events
- Q4: (Mission and Goals): How do you work to engage alumni of this program?
 - Official alumni association, events, outreach, volunteer opportunities within and outside of the program
- Q5: (Resources Associated with Program): How is this scholars program funded? Where does it fall within your department's overall goals and priorities?
- Q6: (Resources Associated with Program): What fundraising initiatives are ongoing or forthcoming for this program?
- Q7: (Resources Associated with Program): Who do you work with most frequently when working with the program?
 - Probes: campus partners, alumni associations
- Q8: (Resources Associated with Program): What type of directives have you received, if any, about how your role/unit/department should interface with the scholars program?
- Q9: (Outcomes, Mission and Goals): How does the scholars program contribute to the overall university's goals, based on your knowledge and experience?
- Q10: (All Dimensions): How has the program changed over the years?
 - Probes: purpose, selection criteria, structural changes

- Q11 (All Dimensions): Tell me about the documents associated with your program and institution that you feel would be most helpful to my further study of your program.
 - Probes: strategic plans, annual reports
- Concluding Question: Is there anything else you would like me to include about this scholars program or your role working with it?